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Socratic Protreptic and Moral Education in Plato's Early Dialogues

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Socratic Protreptic and Moral Education in Plato's Early Dialogues

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Socratic Protreptic and Moral Education in Plato's Early Dialogues

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I examine how Plato, in his early dialogues, tries to make good on Socrates' claims, in the *Apology*, about the value of his philosophical life and the benefits it provides his fellow citizens. Beginning with the *Apology*, I analyze how Socrates tries to exhort people to take care for or tend to virtue and the state of their souls. I argue that Socrates is challenging his fellow-citizens, and Plato his readers, not only to recognize their ignorance, but also to engage in active philosophical inquiry into ethical questions. This aspect of Socrates' mission—his quest to get people to live examined, philosophical lives—is sometimes called *philosophical protreptic*. In subsequent chapters, I analyze the

arguments that Socrates employs in engaging interlocutors in philosophy in three dialogues, the *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, and *Alcibiades I*. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates argues that wisdom is necessary for happiness, but he and his interlocutor discover that they neither have nor understand the wisdom they need. In the *Lysis*, Socrates discusses friendship and love with two youths, and though their inquiry fails, their cooperative philosophical investigation exemplifies philosophical love and friendship. Finally, in the *Alcibiades I,* Socrates tries to convince an ambitious young Alcibiades that true power and happiness arise from self-knowledge, and he challenges the young man to seek self-knowledge by taking up a philosophical life under Socrates' guidance. What emerges in these dialogues is a radical and compelling picture of the good life. Socrates does not believe that he or any human fully understands virtue or happiness. His investigations end inconclusively, and indeed he has little hope that he or anyone else will discover final and complete answers about virtue or happiness. Nevertheless, each dialogue demonstrates both the nature and value of philosophical enquiry. We humans are limited and ignorant, and we need to examine ethical questions together in order to live well. By drawing others into the philosophical discussion—full though it is with problems, inconclusive results, and difficulties—Socrates believes that he is both himself living the best available human life and offering the greatest benefit any human can provide to those with whom he talks.

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Introduction

> I did not follow that path that would have made me of no use either to you or to myself, but I went to each of you privately and conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit, by trying to persuade him not to take care of any of his belongings before taking caring that he himself should be as good and as wise as possible, not to take care of the city's possessions more than for the city itself, and to take care of other things in the same way. What do I deserve for being such a man? Some good, men of Athens, if I must truly make an assessment according to my deserts, and something suitable. (*Apology* 36c-d)

> I believe that I'm one of a few Athenians—so as not to say I'm the only one, but the only one among our contemporaries—to take up the true political craft and practice the true politics. That is because the speeches I make on each occasion do not aim at gratification but at what's best. (*Gorgias* 521d)

0. Socrates and moral education

In the passages cited above, Socrates claims that he, perhaps uniquely among the Athenians of his time, has made it his business to benefit his fellow citizens. Plato's dialogues, in particular his shorter, so-called "early" dialogues, show Socrates engaged in intense and sometimes very personal conversations with his interlocutors. In the *Apology* and *Gorgias*, at least, Socrates suggests that his purpose in these conversations is to provide what he believes to be the "greatest benefit" and to do "what's best" for those with whom he talks. But, in these same dialogues, Socrates often argues that what benefits and is best for humans is to become as wise and virtuous as possible (see, e.g., *Apology* 29e; *Crito* 44d, 47e-48b; *Euthydemus* 282a; *Gorgias* 466e, 470c ff.). If we put these claims together, it

would seem that Socrates is claiming to provide some sort of moral education. He hopes, somehow, to make his fellow citizens better, more virtuous people.

My purpose in this dissertation is to try to make sense of these claims. Now, as many scholars have noted, Plato's Socrates does not appear to have a single "method" that he pursues, even in the restricted set of the early dialogues. His approach varies, depending on the character of his interlocutors, the setting, the topic, Plato's purposes in writing the dialogue, and so on.[1] Thus, my dissertation focuses on just one aspect of Socrates' efforts, his attempts to exhort people to take care of themselves, to attend to virtue, and (what is, I will argue, the same thing) to practice philosophy. In later antiquity, the exhortation to practice philosophy was called *philosophical protreptic* (from the Greek "*protreptikos*," meaning "turning toward"). In Socrates' defense speech in the *Apology*, when he describes and defends his life's work, he claims that exhortation or protreptic is the *point* of his mission in Athens. He confronts his fellow citizens and puts their lives to the test, he says, because he wants to shake them from their thoughtless and unexamined routines and to turn them toward a better way of living, that is, toward philosophy (see *Apology* 39d).[2]

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[1] A recent collection of essays, Scott (2002), explores the question of whether Plato's Socrates has a method, and if so, what it might be. The essays by Carpenter and Polansky (89-100) and Brickhouse and Smith (145-157) argue convincingly that Socrates employs different argument strategies and forms, depending on his purposes at the time.

[2] In *Republic* 7, Socrates says, "Education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around [*tês periagôgês*], and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it" (7.518d). The purpose of education, Socrates explains, is to turn the prisoners in the Cave away from the shadows on the wall so that they can see the puppets that make the shadows and, eventually, the Forms of which the puppets and shadows are imitations. According to this description, education prepares the person for philosophy. Of course, in the *Republic*, not everyone receives this kind of education. Moreover, in the dialogues that I focus on (in Chapters 2, 3, and 4), Socrates directs his efforts particularly toward young, philosophically promising youths. So if the Socrates of the *Apology* makes it his mission to exhort everyone (as he says, "I shall treat in this way anyone I happen to meet, young and old, citizen and stranger" (*Apology* 30a)), it may be that the *Apology* does not have the same view of exhortation as other dialogues. Perhaps the

This dissertation, consequently, is also about Plato's views about the good life. Socrates seeks to turn us toward what he believes is a better way of life; but what is it? In the *Apology*, Socrates claims that *his* life—the philosophical life of discussing virtue every day—is the "greatest good for a human being," and he says, famously, that "the unexamined life is not worth living for human beings" (38a). He refuses to give up philosophy, because he thinks that it is the best way of living available to humans. Part of what he must do, therefore, in order to provide the greatest of benefits to his fellow citizens is to help them to live this life—to convince them that it is worthwhile and to tap in to the deep motivations that would lead them to choose and pursue it. For this reason, the protreptic arguments and passages that I will be looking at are a rich resource for material concerning Plato's thoughts about the good life. In these dialogues, Plato makes a case for philosophy as the good life, and he provides an enactment of that life, in the character of Socrates. One of my purposes in this dissertation, then, is to look at the various arguments and motivational strategies that Socrates employs in these passages, in order to construct an outline of Plato's view about the good life and how he would defend his view.

1. Is Socrates a teacher of virtue?

1.1. Is Plato's Socrates a moral educator? If we believe what he himself says, we would say no. Throughout Plato's dialogues, Socrates consistently denies that he teaches virtue.[3] He also denies that he has the knowledge necessary to teach it, and although he asks

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kind of exhortation that Socrates is describing in the *Apology* is different from the exhortation we see in, for example, the *Euthydemus* and *Lysis* and the turning described in the *Republic*. I think, however, that there are ways to resolve the apparent difference, which I discuss below (see, e.g., Ch. 1, § 4.1-4.3.).

[3] See *Apology* 19d8-e1, 20d9-e2, 33a5-6, 33b5-6; *Laches* 185e4-7a8.

questions about virtue, he insists that he does not know the answers to his own questions.[4] Moreover, he consistently casts doubt on anyone else who claims to be able to teach virtue.[5]

Many influential interpreters of Plato, however, have come to a different conclusion. They feel that, when Socrates denies that he knows and when he says that he is not a teacher, he is not being entirely serious. Instead, he is being ironic. Really, he does have answers in mind, for example, to his questions about virtue. Though it takes effort for the interlocutors to discover those answers, Socrates sets things up so that they can be found; Plato's dialogues are like puzzles, the solutions to which are built into the pages for the readers to find. Similarly, when Socrates denies that he teaches, on this account, he is also being ironic.[6] He means that he does not teach *in the way that the Sophists do*—they give speeches or lectures and expect their listeners to memorize their wisdom.[7] Socrates does not do this. Instead, he asks pointed and leading questions, requiring his "student" to think through and work out the answers for himself. This style of teaching is better, the interpreters say, because it engages the student in active learning, so that when he does

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[4] Socrates insists on his own ignorance regularly: see, e.g., *Apology* 22d, 23a-b; *Euthyphro* 5a3-c5; *Charmides* 165b5-c1.

[5] Protagoras and Hippias, in particular, suffer this fate, in the dialogues named after them. In the *Euthydemus*, as well, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus claim to teach virtue (273d), but the subsequent discussion casts this claim into serious doubt.

[6] Vlastos (1991) advanced the most prominent recent interpretation claiming that Socrates' denials that he has knowledge and teaches it to others are ironic. He writes, "When [Socrates] professes to have no knowledge he both does and does not mean what he says. He wants to assure his hearers that in the moral domain there is not a single proposition that he claims to know with certainty. But in another sense of 'knowledge,' where the word refers to justified true belief [...] there are many propositions that he does claim to know. So too, I would argue, Socrates parallel disavowal of teaching should be understood as a complex irony" (32).

[7] Commentators on Socratic education often contrast Socrates' methods (perhaps rightly) with those of the Sophists. See, e.g., Teloh (1986), Scolnicov (1988), Devereux (1978), and Scott (2000). I think, however, that we need to be cautious about making these kinds of comparisons, because the "Sophists" are not a unified group with a set program of education. Protagoras' teaching methods clearly differ from Euthydemus', and both differ from the methods of rhetoricians like Gorgias. Plato does set up comparisons between Socrates and these figures, but, in each case, the point of the comparison is different.

discover the answer, he'll understand it in way that he wouldn't if he just accepted Socrates' authority.[8] According to this interpretation, Plato has similar purposes with his readers.[9] He sets up the dialogues as puzzles, and he wants his reader to work through those puzzles to decipher the theories or views that lie behind them.[10] For further reference, let's call this the *hidden expert* interpretation.

I think that the hidden expert interpretation has always had some appeal for readers of Plato's dialogues—when I first began studying Plato's dialogues, I remember, I took something like this interpretative approach for granted—but it has also had its fair share of critics.[11] The book that changed my mind about the hidden expert interpretation

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[8] Thus Scolnicov (1988): "Because knowledge can only be attained by personal effort, Socrates could not 'hand it down', but only hint at it by way of understatement" (20). Similarly, Teloh (1986): "Much of what Socrates does is *psychagogia*. Socrates usually does not state positions; rather, he draws the *psychê* to them by innuendo, suggestion, and paradox. [...] Socrates usually does not state positions because he does not believe that one should teach by telling. But how Socrates refutes a position often insinuates to the reader, as it should to the interlocutor, what the Socratic position on an issue is. Socrates usually does not state his view because he does not want to become the new authority; he does not want to produce people like Nicias in the *Laches*, people who repeat without understanding what he says" (2). Finally, Vlastos (1991): "In the conventional sense, where to 'teach' is simply to transfer knowledge from the teacher's to the learner's mind, Socrates means what he says: That sort of 'teaching' he does not want to do and cannot do. But in the sense which *he* would give to 'teaching'—engaging would-be learners in elenctic argument to make them aware of their own ignorance and give them opportunity to discover for themselves the truth the teacher has held back—in that sense of 'teaching' Socrates would want to say that he is a teacher, the best of teachers in his time, the only true teacher" (32).

[9] In this dissertation, I will be particularly interested in trying to work out what *Plato's* purposes are for his readers. I presume (I think reasonably) that his purposes are related, but not necessarily identical, to Socrates' purposes with his interlocutors.

[10] See Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (cited by Kraut 1984): "In a whole series of the early dialogues—*Laches, Charmides, Euthyphro, Lysis*—the conclusion that is meant to be accepted is skillfully masked, so that the reader may be forced to discover it by careful study" (245). So also Versenyi (1963): "There is hardly a dialogue that does not arrive at solutions to the problems discussed. These conclusions are negated at the end merely to prevent the student from uncritically accepting them instead of going through reflection that would make them his own" (118). Versenyi (1975) defends just such an interpretation of the *Lysis* (which, like many other early dialogues, appears to end in an impasse): "In fact, [the *Lysis*] contains a theory of love that is in its essential lines complete and beyond which Socrates, unlike Plato, may not want to go" (186-7). More recently, Penner and Rowe (2005) defend a similar interpretation of the *Lysis*: They claim that the dialogue contains "an argument that springs from, describes, and partly justifies a specific theory—not just about friendship, but about love, including and especially the 'romantic' sort, and desire, all of which turns out to be treated together under the umbrella of *philia*" (xii).

[11] An early, and vehement, critic of the hidden expert interpretation was George Grote (1888), who writes, "To convict men, by cross-examination, of ignorance in respect to those matters which each man believed

was Richard Kraut's *Socrates and the State* (Kraut (1984)). Kraut provides an effective argument against a particularly strong form of the hidden expert approach, according to which Socrates (in some sense) knows the answers to his questions about virtue and frames his arguments so that his interlocutors can discover those answers.[12] Kraut's most immediate objection to this view is that it contradicts the text. As I pointed out above, Socrates consistently *denies* that he has knowledge and that he knows the answers to the questions he asks. So why should we not believe him? We'd need some good reason for thinking that he was being ironic, a clear case where, as the proponents of the interpretation claim, Socrates falsely creates a puzzling *aporia* while leaving hints as to the true answer.

But, Kraut argues, the dialogues that are often cited in this connection do not offer clear cases. Kraut considers four dialogues where the case for the hidden expert interpretation is sometimes made—the *Euthyphro*, *Charmides, Laches,* and *Protagoras*. In these dialogues, so the story goes, the pattern of Socrates' argument or the things that he says suggest the thesis that virtue is knowledge, or (in the *Charmides* and *Laches*) knowledge of good and evil. Perhaps this is the answer that Socrates was looking for, the answer to his questions about virtue that he already knew but held back. Kraut argues that

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himself to know well and familiarly—this was the constant employment and mission of Sokrates: not to teach—for he disclaimed the capacity for teaching—but to make men feel their own ignorance instead of believing themselves to know" (vol. 1, 374). Later, he says, in response to Schleiermacher (1936) and others, "The doubts and difficulties [that Socrates raises] were certainly exercises to the mind of Plato, and were intended as exercises to his readers; but he has nowhere provided the key to the solution of them. Where he propounds positive dogmas, he does not bring them face to face with objections [...] The two currents of his speculation, the affirmative and the negative, are distinct and independent of each other" (399).

[12] I say "a particularly strong form" because I think that most modern interpreters (including Kraut and myself) hold a weaker version of the idea, expressed in an extreme form by this interpretation, that Socrates and Plato express positive views in these dialogues, views that sometimes need to be inferred indirectly from things that Socrates says and arguments that he makes. That is, I think that a completely skeptical interpretation of Socrates or Plato is not tenable. But Kraut's main point is that we should take what Socrates says seriously. When he says he does not know or that he does not teach, we should believe him. But there is no doubt that, at the same time, Socrates claims to know and tries to persuade (though perhaps not *teach*) others of many things. See also Brickhouse and Smith (2000), pp. 58-68, for a thorough discussion of Socratic irony.

it is not. Kraut's main argument is that this simply is not an adequate answer to the questions that Socrates is asking:

> It is not as though [Socrates] thinks that "temperance is knowledge of good and evil" is *false*. Rather, he would say that "knowledge of good and evil" is a way of relabeling temperance, but that it doesn't tell us what it really is. It does not give us the standard the temperate person would use in making decisions about how to act. (258)

Socrates says in the *Euthyphro* that he is looking for "that form itself that makes all pious actions pious [...] so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not" (6d-e). "Knowledge of good and evil" does not provide such a model or standard (*paradeigma*).[13] Now, it is useful and important to know that the state of mind that explains pious actions (or virtuous actions in general) is a kind of knowledge. But unless you actually *have* the knowledge, unless you know what is in fact good and evil, you yourself will not be able to act virtuously.[14]

Indeed, Kraut contends, Socrates believes that he is far from having the moral knowledge necessary in order to *teach* virtue, and for good reason. He is searching for something that is quite difficult to attain. According to Kraut, "[Socrates] wants a substantial [ethical] theory, organized around a small number of core statements [i.e., the definitions of the virtues], that tells us how to decide all practical questions" (282). But,

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[13] Nehamas (1999) agrees: "Knowledge of good and evil cannot in itself constitute a definition of virtue unless one can say independently what these are" (Ch. 2, 37-8). See also Woodruff (1988).

[14] One could argue that the hedonism that Socrates advances in the *Protagoras* (353c ff.) is an attempt to give some content to the idea of "knowledge of good and evil." Something like this argument is made by Irwin (1995). I would say that, even if, as many commentators contend, Socrates himself does not endorse the claim that pleasure is the good and pain the bad, the basic point made in the argument could stand. In order to act correctly, we would need a "science of measurement" of good and bad, which would allow us both to determine what is good and bad in our concrete circumstances and to measure good and bad things against each other.

while Socrates' efforts could make some progress in this search, discovering some truths and correcting errors, it is reasonable to think that the goal, a complete substantial ethical theory, would remain far away, perhaps even, as Socrates seems to believe, beyond the reach of our limited human capacities (284).[15] If Kraut is right about this, the hidden expert interpretation's suggestion that Socrates actually *has* answers to his questions but is holding them back from us begins to look absurd.

1.2 All of this suggests that we need to be cautious about what we read into the dialogues and, unless we have good reason to the contrary, we should take Socrates' claims about himself at face value. It is impossible to deny that Socrates often expresses strong moral beliefs and even, on occasion, claims to *know* that certain strong moral propositions are true (e.g. in the *Apology,* Socrates says, "To do an injustice and disobey a superior, whether divine or human: that, I know, is bad and shameful" (29b6-7)). I would argue, moreover, that the proponents of the hidden expert interpretation have a point when they claim that Plato's *aporiai* (impasses) often conceal important results. But we should take care that we do not make more of those results than they actually are.[16]

[15] The key piece of evidence that Socrates thinks humans cannot fully achieve the wisdom he seeks is his claim, in, for example, the *Apology*, that "in fact the god is wise and [...] human wisdom is worth little or nothing" (23a-b). See Reeve (1989), § 1.7. Kraut cites an apt passage from Nagel, "The Limits of Objectivity": "Even the most civilized human beings have only a haphazard understanding of how to live, how to treat others, how to organize their societies. The idea that the basic principles of morality are *known*, and that the problems all come in their interpretation and application, is one of the most fantastic conceits to which our conceited species has been drawn. [...] Not all of our ignorance in these areas is ethical, but a lot of it is. And the idea of moral progress is an essential condition of moral progress. None of it is inevitable" (136).

[16] In order adequately to evaluate the claim that conversations that end in *aporiai* nevertheless make philosophical progress, we would need to evaluate the dialogues in question on an individual basis. I do this, to some extent, in this dissertation.

Even if Socrates is not a teacher of virtue, however, he is clearly doing something. In fact, from what he says in the passages I cited at the beginning, we could argue that he is at least trying to improve his fellow citizens morally, and, furthermore, that he thinks he's had some success. Otherwise, he would not say that he has provided great benefits to his fellow citizens. Moreover, as I mentioned above, Socrates believes that people are benefited only insofar as they come closer to wisdom and virtue. Therefore, Socrates must believe that he helps others by bringing them closer to virtue and wisdom and farther from vice and ignorance and that there is some way that people can make progress toward virtue and wisdom without acquiring the moral expertise that he believes that god alone has.[17] So what *does* he do? What benefit does he believe he conveys, and how does he do it?

Clearly, part of what Socrates does (as most commentators agree) is to show people that they do not know what they think that they do.[18] In the *Apology*, when he is describing his occupation in the city, he says that he shows people that they are not wise, even though they think they are.[19] The Oracle at Delphi singles Socrates out for his "human wisdom"—Socrates "understands that his wisdom is worthless" (23b). But the opposite of human wisdom, thinking that you know what you do not, is "the most reproachable ignorance

[17] Kraut notes that there is an important difference between "teaching virtue"—in the sense of successfully making another into a moral expert—and "bringing it about that someone is closer to virtue than he was before" (296). Socrates could believe that both he and the Athenian education system do the latter, without also believing that anyone can do the former.

[18] This function of Socrates' cross-examinations is emphasized by Grote, vol. 1, 374 ff.

[19] *Apology* 21c-d, 23b, 29a-b. Reeve (1989) argues that Socrates does this partly in order "to bring about something Apollo values" (27). Socrates learns from the Oracle that the wisest (and thus best) human is one who recognizes that no human being possesses any knowledge of value. So Socrates goes about trying promote intellectual humility, since that is what the god values.

[*eponeidistos amathia*]" (29b1-2). Socrates does his best to rid people of that ignorance and thereby to make them better and happier people.[20]

Indeed, Socrates' typical style in the early dialogues—eliciting interlocutors' beliefs about virtues and other important matters, then cross-examining them and showing that their beliefs are inadequate in some way or conflict with other things they believe—seems well suited to reveal ignorance (at least given certain assumptions about what knowledge must involve).[21] Socrates does not have to know the answers himself to be able to show someone else that he does not know what he is talking about. All Socrates has to do is to show the interlocutor that his beliefs are inadequate in some way, or to get him to change his mind by showing him the consequences of holding them.

This much, therefore, is relatively uncontroversial. But then the question becomes, is there anything *more* to what Socrates does than merely exposing ignorance? What more can he do?

As I mentioned before, Socrates clearly has some strong moral views.[22] It is reasonable to think (and most commentators do) that Socrates is trying to convince his

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[20] I do not claim that, at this point, it is obvious why Socrates believes that thinking you know what you do not know is so bad, and the knowledge of your ignorance is so good. I address this question in the chapters that follow. But see Brickhouse and Smith (1994), who give a good account of the value of the "destructive aspect" of Socrates' cross-examinations (16-17).

[21] See Woodruff (1990) and Reeve for accounts of Socrates' criteria for expert knowledge.

[22] Commentators have wondered how Socrates came by these views, and on what basis he holds them (see, e.g., Vlastos (1983); Polansky (1985); Bolton (1993); Benson (1995); May (1997); Brickhouse and Smith (2000), ch. 2; Woodruff (2000)). In recent years, this issue has been entangled with questions about the nature and purposes of Socrates' "elenchus," his distinctive method of cross-examination. These issues are too complex for me to address here. I would like to say, however, that I think that the "problem of the elenchus"—as Vlastos (1992a) calls it—has been overemphasized in this area. Socrates says how he comes by his views in the *Crito*: "Not only now but at all times I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me" (46b). This is a reasonable description of how any philosophically minded person comes by his views (at least ideally). The problems for this approach are the same as for any other: What grounds the premises of the arguments? What makes some arguments better than others? Metaphilosophical questions of this sort can confront any philosopher.

interlocutors to accept these views,[23] or, alternatively, to see that they already accept them themselves.[24] In some dialogues, this is clearly what Socrates is trying to do (e.g., with Clinias in the *Euthydemus*, or Polus and Callicles in the *Gorgias*). In other dialogues, it is less clear what Socrates expects his interlocutors to believe (if anything). But even in these cases, some positive results can be discerned (though, as I said before, there is good reason to think that these fall short of *answers* to Socrates' questions). As Brickhouse and Smith (2000) convincingly argue, even if Socrates' elenctic arguments fall short of *proving* views to his interlocutors, they nevertheless demonstrate important relationships and conceptual connections between ideas and therefore give the interlocutor *reasons* to believe one view over another (87-9). For example, when Socrates shows Laches that the example of retrograde troop movements contradicts his idea about what courage is, he gives Laches a reason to change his mind. Laches is not logically *compelled* (he could deny that retrograde movements are ever courageous) but that really does not matter. Because he accepts the counterexample, he is willing to admit that his original suggestion was wrong. It is at least conceivable, therefore, that Socrates could persuade his interlocutors of things he believes, even though the premises he uses are secured by nothing stronger than his interlocutor's agreement and belief.

Similar things could be said about what Plato intends for his readers to get out of the dialogues. Blanket statements about Plato's intentions are impossible, of course, but there is no reason to deny straight off that Plato might sometimes seek to convince his

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[23] Kraut 294-5; Irwin (1995), 18-19; Benson (2002), 107 ff.

[24] Reeve (1989): "Socrates does not believe that elenctic examination is teaching, because he does not believe that such examination conveys or imparts any knowledge or information that the examinee did not already possess" (164). See also Woodruff (1990): "The elenchus [...] exposes what you believe in the last analysis, and simply treats this sort of belief, without apology, as non-expert knowledge" (101).

readers of positions that he holds, by means of (among other things) Socrates' arguments. That is not to say that it is easy to decide what Plato intends or what he is trying to convince us to accept. But in the end, it may not matter what Plato intended—what is important is whether or not we are, in fact, convinced.

2. The importance of protreptic

2.1 So far, what I've said has been framed by an assumption that I haven't challenged. That Socrates' (and Plato's) primary purpose in the dialogues is to put forward arguments for positions.[25] That is, on this story, when Socrates talks to someone the main thing that he is trying to do is to change his *beliefs*.[26] Accepting this assumption, we evaluate Socrates' arguments, paste together his assertions, and try to construct the moral theory that he is defending. In some cases, commentators also assume that Socrates is Plato's spokesman, and so the theory that Socrates defends is Plato's theory (perhaps at the time he wrote the dialogue in question, it being open to him to change his mind later).

In this dissertation, one of my goals will be to call this assumption into question. By focusing on how Socrates manipulates beliefs, we miss out on an important part of what Socrates is doing and of how he hopes to benefit his fellow citizens. As I argue in Chapter 1, Socrates thinks that a significant part of his mission is to exhort people to change their lives and to take care of their souls. But taking care of one's soul (and anything else, in fact) is an *activity*. Socrates believes that the best activity by which we can take care of our

[25] Not all of the commentators I mentioned above accept this assumption, of course, but I think that it represents a frame of mind for interpretation that has shaped many of the debates about Plato and Socrates.
[26] I have not developed this thought, but there may be a connection between this assumption and the intellectualist interpretation of Socrates in Plato's early dialogues. If Socrates believes that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue, he would think that he needed to change people's beliefs in order to help them become more virtuous. This is a very complicated issue, not only in the interpretation of Plato but also in contemporary moral psychology.

souls is *philosophical activity*. Therefore, a significant part of Socrates' mission is to exhort people to practice philosophy—Socrates' philosophical protreptic. I do not mean to say that philosophical protreptic is Socrates' only goal, but it is a significant one that we need to understand.

Socrates' protreptic arguments, as we'll see, contain arguments meant to convince his interlocutors to change their beliefs.[27] But they also work on the interlocutor in other ways. They seek to tap into or redirect his desires. Sometimes they seek to make the interlocutor ashamed of his ignorance or his current way of thinking.[28] And, often, they try to engage with what is perhaps the most important motivation for philosophy, the sense of wonder, the desire to know and understand. Socrates wants to transform their *lives*, and, as we'll see, he does this not only by changing their beliefs, but also by initiating them into a new way of living. Philosophy for Socrates, I argue, is both an attitude (the *love* of wisdom) and an activity (the active pursuit of wisdom), and Socrates tries to make the interlocutors in the dialogues I'll be considering philosophers in both senses.

Once again, we can say similar things about Plato's purposes with his readers.[29] Of course, the situations are not quite the same. In some ways, Socrates has more tools at his disposal than Plato does: First, Socrates sees and talks to his interlocutors in person, and so he can shape what he says to fit the specific character and beliefs of the person with

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[27] An example is Socrates' protreptic argument with Clinias, which seeks, among other things, to convince Clinias to believe that wisdom is necessary for happiness (278e ff.; see Chapter 2).

[28] The ways that Socrates uses his interlocutors' sense of shame are discussed by Kahn (1983), McKim (1988), Gordon (1999), and Woodruff (2000).

[29] Gordon (1999) provides an interesting and useful study of the way that Plato constructs his dialogues to engage his readers in philosophy. Gordon's approach is different from mine (she uses reader response theory to construct a theory of the reading of a Platonic dialogue, whereas I focus on analyzing texts), but I am sympathetic with much that she says.

whom he is talking. In other words, Socrates' discussions are *ad hominem.*[30] Second, when Socrates is talking to other characters, he can see when they do not understand, what they disagree with, and he can go into further detail and answer their questions. Plato's written works can do neither of these things.[31] But, at the same time, Plato's readers have some advantages over Socrates' interlocutors. Readers can reread the dialogues carefully; they are (usually) more committed and clever than the people with whom Socrates talks. Despite these differences, however, I think that, in many cases, Plato's *purposes* are quite similar to Socrates'. Plato wants to make his readers philosophers. He wants them to see that the problems he addresses in the dialogues are interesting and important, and he wants them to join him in his philosophical search. Plato's Socrates enacts a life of philosophical searching that Plato believes to be the only one worth living for a human being. Plato shows Socrates engaging others in this life, and (so I will argue) he hopes thereby to engage his readers in the search, as well.

[30] On the *ad hominem* character of Socrates' cross-examinations, see Robinson (1953); Teloh (1986).
[31] In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates criticizes writing on the grounds, first, on the grounds that a written piece "doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not"—that is, a written work cannot discern the natures of the souls in its audience and so cannot shape its words to have the appropriate effect—and it "can neither defend itself nor come to its own support"—it cannot elaborate or provide further defense for the points it makes (275e).

Chapter I:

Socrates' Philosophical Mission in the *Apology*

0. Introduction

Plato's *Apology* is, deservedly, one of his most widely read works. Plato's account of Socrates' defense speech communicates a sense of poignancy and drama rarely if ever matched in the history of philosophy. Part of its power derives from its deeply personal subject: Plato's teacher and friend, defending himself in a trial for his life.[32] But the main reason that the dialogue captivates us and that we keep reading it after so many centuries is Socrates' compelling and uncompromising defense of his way of life. Socrates not only denies that his philosophical activities harm the city or corrupt its youth; he also makes bold claims about their value.[33] He tells the jury, "No greater good has come to be in the city than my service to the god [*tên emên tôi theôi hupêresian*]" (30a5-7); and, "He [the

[32] The *Apology* is the only work in which Plato mentions his own presence. This fact tends to lend the work an air of truth that Plato usually avoids. For example, in the *Phaedo*, which portrays a similarly dramatic and emotional event, Plato explicitly distances himself from the account. He frames the dialogue as an account that Phaedo tells his friend Echecrates some time after the event, and Phaedo explicitly mentions that Plato was not present (59b). Of course, that does not mean that the work records what actually happened at the trial—for recent arguments that it does not, see Morrison (2000) and Prior (2001). Whether or not it *is* historical, however, is not important to me. I am trying to find out what the *Apology* tells us about *Plato's* views (about what Plato found to be important in his teacher's life and work), not about the historical Socrates.

[33] According to Friedländer (1964), "Plato's objective [in the *Apology*] was not to make Socrates vanish, as it were, among others who are like him, but to show how Socrates differed from other men and why." The defense, he says, is "an attack—a moment in the everlasting struggle between the individual and the mass of mankind, between *aretê* and vulgarity, between philosophy and sophistry" (159).

Olympic victor] makes you seem to be happy, while I make you be it" (36d9-e1).[34] Socrates maintains that his way of life is both the best way for a human being to live and the most productive of happiness for others.

Yet, despite its importance, we do not really have a very clear sense of what Socrates' way of life and his "mission" for the sake of the god Apollo really is. What does it involve? What does he hope to accomplish? And how is it supposed to provide its great benefits? We know that Socrates examines people, questions them about virtue, and shows them that they do not know what they think they do. This is what is often called "the Socratic elenchus," and many commentators have written about its methods and aims as it appears in the dialogues.[35] But, according to the *Apology*, Socrates' mission is not simply to refute people. He also exhorts them to change their lives, to *care for* (*epimeleisthai*, in Greek) virtue and the state of their souls above all else. Socrates apparently thinks that his elenctic cross-examinations are an important part of or means to this exhortation. Socrates believes that getting people to care for virtue and their souls is what his mission is really about.

In this chapter, I provide an analysis of Socrates' mission, with particular focus on its goal, "care for" virtue and the soul. I argue that, because of the way that the word *epimeleisthai* is usually translated into English, most readers do not have a good sense of what Socrates really means by "caring for" one's soul and of what he is trying to get people to do. By surveying the contexts and uses of *epimeleisthai* and its cognates in Plato and

[34] My translations from Plato in this chapter are adapted from Cooper's collection (1997). I have adapted the translations in order to bring out points of grammar and wording that might not otherwise be evident. In such cases, I include the Greek text.

[35] Some of the more important discussions of the "Socratic method" and the elenchus in particular include Robinson (1953), Vlastos (1983), Kraut (1983), Brickhouse and Smith (1984), Polansky (1985), Benson (1995), and May (1997). Scott (2002) is a collection of recent essays on the topic.

other authors, we can see that Socrates is trying to get his fellow-citizens not only to adopt a certain affective or epistemic attitude, but also to *do* something, to live an active *philosophical* life.[36] Ideally, Socrates' examinations and refutations are merely a step in this greater mission.[37] Socrates is serious when he says:

> It is the greatest good [*megiston agathon*] for a human being to discuss virtue [*peri aretês tous logous poeisthai*] every day and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining both myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being. (38a2-5)

I've divided this chapter into four main sections. In the first, I describe the *means* that Socrates says he uses, and I give an account of the three activities in which he says that his occupation consists. In the second, I consider the *purpose* of the mission. What is Socrates trying to get people to do? Then, in the third, I consider the ways and reasons why so many people go wrong, why they need Socrates' help in the first place. Finally, in the last section, I sum up the mission as a whole. How does the occupation Socrates describes achieve his goal? How do the city and its citizens receive the "greatest benefit"?

1. Three activities

1.1 Socrates' speech in the *Apology* has several purposes. Its main purpose, of course, is to answer Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon's charges of impiety. In order to do this, Socrates believes that he must also respond to older accusers, like Aristophanes, who have

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[36] Many of the usual translations for *epimeleisthai*—such as "care for," "have a care for," and "be concerned for"—suggest that Socrates is trying to get people to adopt an affective attitude—he is trying to get the them to *feel* care or concern. According to one common interpretation of the *Apology*, however, Socrates' mission is to disabuse people of their hubris and to encourage human wisdom, an attitude of epistemic modesty. See, for example, Reeve (1989), p. 185. I argue that neither of these interpretations is adequate.

[37] I say "ideally" because, as it turns out, most of those that Socrates questions fail to receive this greater benefit. Many such characters appear in the dialogues—Euthyphro, Laches, and Callicles, to name a few. In such cases, disabusing hubris is the best that Socrates can hope for, and he often fails to achieve even that. See below (esp. § 5.1) for more details.

promulgated a popular caricature of him as a sophist teacher and natural scientist. He devotes some of his speech to directly answering these two sets of accusations.[38] But the greater portion of the speech responds to the accusations only indirectly and consists of Socrates describing and defending his occupation and philosophical way of life.[39] He wants to explain, first, how his activities would have created enough animosity amongst his fellow-citizens that they would be inclined to prosecute him, and, second, why those activities are not only harmless but even beneficial to the city.

In the course of his account, Socrates describes three distinct but related activities that he believes constitute his mission for Apollo: *examination*, in which Socrates tests the knowledge claims of people who think that they are wise;[40] *refutation* or *showing*, in which he shows those people that they don't know what they think they know;[41] and *exhortation*, in which he urges them to change their values and their way of life.[42] Socrates maintains that these activities together constitute his service to the god; he goes so far as to say that if he were to stop practicing them, he would be disobeying the god's orders (37e).

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[38] There is some scholarly debate about whether or not Socrates succeeds in answering the indictment. Stone (1988) (chapter 14, in particular) contends that Socrates not only failed to answer the charges, but also antagonized the jury in order to be convicted. Reeve (1989), on the other hand, argues that Socrates has successfully answered the charges, in accordance with the rules of Athenian courts (see esp. ch. 2). See also Brickhouse and Smith (1989).

[39] Socrates' direct response to the popular caricature occurs at 19c5-20c3, in less than a Stephanus page. His direct response to Meletus and the indictment occurs at 24b3-28a4, less than four Stephanus pages, when he cross-examines Meletus. The defense speech as whole, however, is almost nineteen Stephanus pages long (17a1-35d8).

[40] Socrates uses the following language to describe what I'm calling "examination": "*diaskopôn*" (21c2); "*dialegomenos*" (c5); also perhaps "*exetazomenôn*" and "*exetasô*" (23c4, 29e5) (which often seems to refer to both examination and refutation).

[41] Language for refutation or showing includes: "*deiknunai*" (21c8; also 23a7); "*exelenchô*" and "*elenxô*" (23a5, 29e5).

[42] Socrates' word for exhortation at 29d5 is "*parakeloumenos*." A few lines later he says, "For I go around doing nothing but *persuading* [*peithôn*] both the young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul" (30a7-b2; my emphasis). Persuading and exhorting seem to be two names for the same activity.

1.2 The first two activities emerge in Socrates' story about the origin of his mission. Some years ago, Socrates says, his friend Chaerophon had asked the oracle at Delphi, as a joke, if anyone was wiser than Socrates. No one, the oracle answered. Socrates was perplexed by this response. He knew that the god could not lie, but he also did not believe that he was wise, since he was aware of many things that he did not know. So he decided to begin an investigation, to try to understand the meaning of the oracle and its riddle (21b). He would try to find someone wiser than he is, so that he could "refute [*elenxôn*] the pronouncement and say to the oracle, 'here's someone wiser than I, yet you said that I was wisest'" (21c1-2).

Socrates describes his first attempt. He approached someone who reputed to be wise, one of the politicians, and he examined and talked to him. Socrates explains what happened next:

> And when I examined him [...] and talked to him, men of Athens, my experience was something like this: I thought this man seemed wise to many people, and especially to himself, but wasn't. Then [*kapeita*] I tried to show him that he thought himself wise, but wasn't. (21c3-8)

Notice how Socrates distinguishes two aspects of the encounter: He began by examining the person, trying to see what he knows; *then* ("*kapeita*") he tried to show the man that he was mistaken about his own wisdom. The first stage is what I call *examination*, and it clearly responds to the challenge that Socrates perceives in the oracle. As he says, he wants to find a counterexample for the oracle, and so he examines the politician to see if this man fits the bill. But, it would seem that, in order to do *that*, he would not need to *show* the man that he is ignorant. And, in fact, it's the showing that makes the politician and others watching dislike Socrates. So why does Socrates do this second thing? He laments that his

questioning has made him so unpopular, but, if his goal had been only to test the oracle, couldn't he have avoided unpopularity by being more tactful?[43]

For example, consider the *Euthyphro*: It does not take long, for Socrates or the reader, to see that Euthyphro is ignorant. After receiving a few inadequate answers, Socrates could have noted to himself that Euthyphro did not know what he claimed and politely deferred to his supposed wisdom. Socrates may have been able to establish that he was wiser than Euthyphro without alienating the man.

Perhaps Socrates did not approach examination in this way for practical reasons: Maybe you just cannot *do* a proper examination without, as a side effect, revealing the examinee's ignorance. (It's very hard for an eye doctor, for example, to determine whether or not his patient can see clearly without the patient finding out for herself the result.) But it is obvious, from what Socrates says here and in the rest of the *Apology*, that Socrates always wanted to do more than simply test the oracle.

For one thing, as I've pointed out above, Socrates himself explicitly distinguishes showing from examination: He examines, *then* he shows the person that he does not know what he thinks he does. There is no indication that Socrates shows the person his ignorance in order to be sure that he really doesn't know—Socrates can see that he does not. Moreover, after the initial story, Socrates' references to examination decrease in significance, and he focuses on what follows the examination. When Socrates summarizes his occupation a little later, he explains, "Even now I continue to search and examine, in

[43] Some scholars have discussed this problem: How does Socrates derive his mission, with all of its complexity, from the Oracle's simple (and, indeed, relatively unambiguous) pronouncement? Reeve (1989) (discussed below), Brickhouse and Smith (1989) (§ 2.5), and McPherran (1996) (§ 2.2 and § 4.2) give accounts of how the mission can be seen to flow from the Oracle's pronouncement. But Hackforth (1933), Montuori (1981), and Stokes (1992) argue that the Oracle story fails to account for Socrates' mission.

response to the god, any person, citizen, or foreigner I believe to be wise. Whenever he seems not to be so to me, I come to the assistance of the god [*tôi theôi boêthôn*] and show him that he is not wise" (23b). This passage makes clear how Socrates understands his mission. He *examines* people "in response to the god"—that is, in response to the god's oracle. But his "assistance" to the god comes when he shows his answerers their ignorance and refutes their false claims to knowledge.

(It is worth noting, however, that examination and refutation *could* be accomplished by means of the one activity. That is, Socrates could both examine people and show them their ignorance by asking them questions and cross-examining their answers. What would distinguish the "examination" and "showing" aspects, in that case, would be Socrates distinct *purposes* in posing the questions. He wants both to find out if the person in question is wise and, supposing he's not, to show him that he is not. This seems to be how it works in practice in most of the dialogues.[44])

In his book, *Socrates in the* Apology, C. D. C. Reeve gives a good account of these two activities and why Socrates feels that showing ignorance is necessary. According to Reeve, Socrates began examining people with a reputation for wisdom in order to interpret the oracle. He was "seeking to uncover in this way the true proposition which was the oracle's hidden meaning" (45). That true proposition turned out to be this: That person is wisest and best who, like Socrates, recognizes that no human being has any knowledge of the most important things. But, Reeve argues, once Socrates arrived at this interpretation, he took it as his mandate from the god to produce the same "human wisdom" in others, to

[44] In the *Euthyphro, Charmides*, and *Laches,* for example, Socrates simply asks questions until all his interlocutors give up. A contrast may be the *Alcibiades* I, where Socrates explicitly argues that Alcibiades is ignorant, given his failure to answer certain questions adequately (116e-118b; see also 108e-109a).

purge them of their hubris and their false belief in their own wisdom. As Reeve explains, "[Socrates'] elenctic activities do not become senseless once it has been sufficiently established that the oracle is true. They go on being important as long as he believes that they continue to bring about something Apollo values"—namely, human wisdom (27).[45]

Socrates had set out to understand the god's message, and the interpretation at which he arrives is a radical one. According to Reeve, there probably was not much to the oracle's pronouncement: Chaerophon probably asked, "Is anyone wiser than Socrates?", to which the oracle responded by drawing a bean indicating a negative answer.[46] So it wasn't an order. It didn't tell Socrates to *do* anything. In fact, the answer itself was unambiguous. But, given that Socrates believed that he had no wisdom, he found it to be puzzling, and he took the enigmatic answer as a challenge: First, as a challenge to understand, then, as a challenge to take action. Socrates' cross-examinations are his response to that challenge.

1.3 After an interlude in which Socrates questions Meletus, Socrates returns to describing his occupation and his mission in Athens. This time, however, he describes it very differently, so differently, in fact, that it is not obvious he is even talking about the same thing. I call this third activity "exhortation." This new activity appears in Socrates'

[45] I agree with Reeve's interpretation except for this: I don't think that the inculcation of antihubristic human wisdom is all that Socrates is doing. As I will argue below, I think Socrates also wants to learn, along with others, as much as he can about virtue.

[46] Reeve explains: "There were [...] two methods of consulting the oracle. One, involving the sacrifice of sheep and goats, was quite expensive but resulted in a written response. The other—the so-called method of 'the two beans'—was substantially cheaper but resulted only in a response by lot. Since Chaerophon was notoriously poor, it seems probably that he consulted the oracle by the latter method. He asked, 'Is anyone wiser than Socrates?' The Pythia responded by drawing forth a bean whose color indicated a negative answer" (29). Reeve cites some of the literature concerning this issue.

response to an offer he imagines the jury making to him: Give up philosophy, and we will acquit you. Socrates' response is worth quoting at length:

> I'll obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I won't give up practicing philosophy [*philosophôn*], exhorting [*parakelouomenos*] and showing the way [*endeiknumenos*] to any of you I ever happen to meet, saying just the sorts of things I am accustomed to say: My excellent man [...] are you not ashamed [*ouk aischunê*] that you take care [*epimeloumenos*] to acquire as much wealth as possible—and reputation and honor—but that about wisdom and truth, about how your soul may be in the best possible condition, you take neither care nor thought [*ouk epimelêi oude phrontizeis*]? (29d3-e3)

When someone claims he does care, Socrates examines and tests ("*elenxô*") him.

> And if he doesn't seem to me to possess virtue, though he claims that he does, I'll reproach [*oneidiô*] him, saying that he treats the most important things as having the least value, and inferior ones as having more [*ta pleistou axia peri elachistou poieitai, ta de phaulotera peri pleionos*]. (29e5-30a2)

Socrates gives no indication that he is describing a new activity or a different aspect of his occupation. On the contrary, he claims that he's saying "just the sort of things [he] is accustomed to say" when he finds people making false claims. But it sounds like he is talking about something different. Is this new activity, "exhortation," distinct from Socrates' elenctic cross-examinations? Or is it merely another function of the elenchus?[47]

These are important questions to ask, because the answers we give to them bear on how we interpret the purposes and significance of the Socrates' questioning in the dialogues. How much is Socrates' questioning supposed to achieve? If exhortation is a distinct activity from examination and showing, the elenctic cross-examinations that we see

[47] Reeve does not distinguish Socrates' tasks of showing people their ignorance and exhorting them to care for virtue. Both belong to what he calls the third stage of Socrates' elenctic examining: "His positive mission of exhorting Athens to virtue [...] followed on his interpretation of the oracle as a divine command to disabuse his fellows of their hubris" (122). Reeve seems to consider these as two sides of the same thing. But this is not obviously the case. Rappe (1995) argues that showing and exhortation are the same, mostly on the grounds that Socrates does not distinguish them in the *Apology*.

in dialogues like the *Euthyphro* might only be a preliminary step, with exhortation to come later. After all, the dialogues do not often show Socrates asking his interlocutors, "Aren't you ashamed?"[48] Nor, in most cases, does he explicitly exhort them to care about virtue and the state of their souls.[49] On the other hand, perhaps exhortation is an implicit function of the elenchus. Perhaps Socrates, in showing people their ignorance, is implicitly exhorting them to change their lives.

So are showing and exhortation the same? At first glance, at least, it is not obvious that they are. In grammatical terms, showing or refutation (as described at 21c and 23b) takes place in the indicative mood: "I [...] show him that he's not wise." Socrates is making the person aware of a fact—an unpleasant fact, but a fact nevertheless—with which he can do what he will. But exhortation demands action. When I exhort someone, I express my view that she *ought* to be doing something.[50] Reproach (*oneidein*), another of Socrates' terms for this activity (*Apology* 30a1), is the flip side of exhortation: I reproach her for doing the wrong thing or for not doing what she ought.

Moreover, exhortation, as Socrates describes it, involves more than showing. That is, when I exhort someone, I exhort her to do something relatively specific. Socrates exhorts his fellow citizens to change their values, to be ashamed of their ignorance, and to care for virtue, their souls, and other such things. On the other hand, when I show someone something, they may not know what to do. I have not (directly) told them. Thus, on the face of it, showing—demonstrating to someone that she does not know what she

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[48] He comes close in the *Gorgias*, where shame seems to play a particularly important role in the refutations. See McKim (1988). An exception is *Alcibiades I*, 108e-109a, cited above.

[49] The exceptions that I have seen are *Alcibiades I*, 119a8-9, 124b2-6; and *Euthydemus* 275a (here, Socrates urges the sophists Euthydemus and Dionysodorus to exhort Clinias to care about virtue; and he gives his own demonstration later in the dialogue (281c ff.)).

[50] Socrates' word for exhorting, *parakeloumenos*, is etymologically related to *keleuein*, to command.

thinks she does—and exhortation—urging someone to do something different or change her values—are two different things. The latter recommends a course of action, whereas the former does not.

Nevertheless, there are connections between the two activities that explain why Socrates associates them, especially given the kinds of issues with which Socrates is concerned. Even with mundane facts, showing someone that she has things wrong can have normative import: Jane believes that her car is ready for her long trip. I show her that its engine is a quart low on oil. By showing her this fact, I've shown her that she has a reason that she did not know that she had, a reason to stop off at the convenience store to get oil and put it in her car before she heads off.

Thus, when Socrates shows people their ignorance, he often shows them, in addition, that they have reasons to change their lives. This is particularly true given the things about which Socrates questions people. Socrates does not ask questions about mundane things like shoemaking or the weather. His concern is "the other most important things [*talla ta megista*]" (22d). We know from the dialogues what he means and what kind of questions he asks: questions about virtue and how to live well. But beliefs about virtue and how to live form the foundations of people's lives.[51] When people decide what to do, they make their decisions on the basis of what they think is important and good, on what they think will make them happy. Someone who has false beliefs about these matters may very well doom himself to a life of frustration, failure, and unhappiness. So when Socrates shows people that they have do not know what they think they do in these matters, he

[51] As Teloh (1986) says, "Socrates does not ask about the weather or how one's children are; he asks about those beliefs which form the core of one's self-image" (15). So also, according to Scott (2000), Socrates takes aim at the things that his interlocutors most trust—their unexamined beliefs and assumptions—and thereby sets them free from the limits these unexamined beliefs place upon their characters (see, e.g., 56-60).

shows them that they have strong reasons to do something different—to abandon the projects they've based on their beliefs in these areas, to sort out what the truth actually is. Showing people their ignorance in these areas is not much different from exhorting them to care more for virtue and to change their values.

Many of the early dialogues illustrate the connection between the two activities.[52] Euthyphro believes that he is an expert in piety. He has studied the stories about the gods, and he believes that he can decide what is pious and impious based on this knowledge. But he takes his basic beliefs about piety (in particular, that it is possible to learn about piety in this way) for granted. As a result, there is an important sense in which he does not "care for" virtue.[53] Because he thinks he is already an expert on piety, he devotes his attention and energy to doing what he believes to be pious things (like prosecuting his father) and to offering his opinions to others—but not to thinking about the basic nature of piety.[54] When Socrates refutes Euthyphro's knowledge claims, however, he undermines the foundation upon which Euthyphro had built his life and reputation.[55] If he takes Socrates' refutation to heart, he must realize that, so far in his life, he has not taken virtue seriously, and now he needs to change. By upsetting people's confidence in their deeply

[52] I assume, in this dissertation, that other dialogues, like the *Euthyphro* and many others, shed light on Socrates' mission as described in the *Apology*. There is no doubt that Plato has other purposes in these dialogues than to show Socrates in action engaged in his mission. But I think it is reasonable to assume that this is one of his purposes, and one of my goals in this dissertation is to show that the goals described in the *Apology* are ones that continue to concern Plato.

[53] See the next section for more on this issue.

[54] According to Woodruff (1990), one particular problem for people who claim to be experts is that others rely on them. So they had better know what they are talking about.

[55] Seeskin (1987) describes Euthyphro's behavior as *hubris*: "Euthyphro's behavior presupposes certainty on matters which are probably beyond human comprehension. That is why the *elenchus* is so damaging to Euthyphro: it shows that he is not even close to mastering the knowledge his behavior requires" (79).

held beliefs about virtue and values, Socrates thus unsettles their ways of life.[56] For Socrates, then, showing and exhortation are intimately connected. Socrates does not refute knowledge claims merely for the sake of refutation; he refutes because it puts people's lives on trial and, indirectly, exhorts them to change.

Despite the connections, however, I think we should distinguish between the two activities, for two reasons. The first has to do with conceptual clarity: We should distinguish conceptually between showing someone a fact and exhorting someone to do something, even if it turns out, in the end, that Socrates does both at the same time. Second, and more importantly, we should not prematurely rule out the possibility that Socrates has more to do, as we are at risk of doing if we conflate exhortation and showing too quickly. It might turn out (as I will argue it does) that, at least with the right kinds of interlocutors, Socrates' refutations are only the beginning of his philosophical mission.

2. What it means to care for something

2.1 In the passage I cited above (near the beginning of 1.3), Socrates describes himself as exhorting his fellow citizens to change their lives. He says that people who have false beliefs about the most important things but do not recognize their ignorance should be "ashamed" that they are not "taking care [*epimelê*]" and "having thought [*phrontizê*]" for wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of their souls. He claims that they are inverting the correct values, overvaluing inferior things and undervaluing the most important ones (29d-30a). Later, he says that he comes to each of them "like a father or elder brother,"

[56] Thus Nicias' warning about Socrates to Lysimachus in the *Laches*: "Whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and associates with him in conversation must necessarily [...] keep on being led by the man's arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto. And when he does submit to this questioning, you don't realize that Socrates will not let him go before he has well and truly tested [*basanisêi*] every last detail" (187e6-8a2).

trying "to persuade you to care about virtue [*epimeleisthai arêtes*]" (31b4-5). Socrates wants people to care and have thought for (*epimeleisthai, phrontizein*) wisdom, truth, virtue, and their souls, rather than wealth, reputation, and their bodies and possessions. But what exactly does he want his fellow citizens to do? What does it mean to "care for" virtue or one's soul?

In order to answer these questions, we need to look more carefully at the language Socrates uses in these passages—in particular, at the key verb, *epimeleisthai* (in the noun form, *epimeleia*). *Epimeleisthai* is often translated as "to care for." But, as is the case with many Greek words and their common English translations, the fit is not perfect.[57] In order to see what Socrates is saying, we need to look more closely at the way the word *epimeleisthai* and its cognates were used by Plato and his contemporaries.[58]

The root for these words, *epimel-*, is composed of two parts: the root "*mel-*"—meaning "concern," "thought," or "interest"—with the prefix "*epi-*"—meaning "upon" or "over." Thus, their radical sense is "concern, thought, or interest directed upon or over something." In both verb and noun form, *epimel-* is often complemented by a genitive that indicates the object upon which concern or interest is directed.[59]

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[57] The difficulty of translating *epimeleisthai* and its cognates with a single English word is reflected in the many ways that translators have rendered it in the Platonic corpus, from "care for" in the *Apology*, to "pay attention" in *Republic* 6 (Socrates is saying that the true navigator must "pay attention [*tên epimeleian poieisthai*]" to the sky and stars (488d5)), to "experience" in the *Charmides* (Critias should understand Charmides' definition of *sôphrosunê*, "because of his age and experience [*epimeleias*]" (162e2)). These translations come from Cooper (1997).

[58] Because there is no one English word that captures the sense of *epimeleia* and its cognates, I will generally leave the word untranslated through the rest of this chapter. I will use *epimeleisthai* when referring to the family of words, *epimeleia* when referring to the activity.

[59] There is also an adjectival form, used either to describe someone who is "caring for" or "anxious about" something, or, in an absolute sense, to characterize someone as "careful" or "attentive" in general (see *LSJ* sv. "*epimelês*").

The *LSJ* defines the verb form, "*epimeleomai*," as "to take care of, have charge of: to have the management of: to pay attention to, cultivate." In some cases, a person "has the management of" something as a result of a specific public commission or delegation.[60] But this need not be the case: Farmers are said to "manage" or "cultivate" their fields[61]; craftsmen to "pay attention to" their crafts[62]; and even the gods to "have charge of" or "be caretakers of" us, their property.[63]

In one common construction of *epimeleisthai*, the verb is complemented by an object clause of effort.[64] The object clause is introduced by *hopôs*, usually with a future indicative verb. Thus, "*epimeleomai tinos hopôs hôs beltistos estai*" means something like "I take care of something *with the object that* it be as good as possible." This construction is teleological, in that the object clause identifies the *end* that the subject of the verb has in mind in caring for, managing, or attending to the object. This construction with *epimeleisthai* appears several times in the *Apology*.[65]

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[60] White (1995) lists a variety of cases where "*epimelesthai*" is used to indicate the functions carried out by overseers whom foreign powers assign to manage the business of their subject cities (316 fn. 29). But it is also used to describe more mundane official functions, such as the commissions of army officers (Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.14), the supervision of a sacred olive grove (Lys. 7.29), or the management of a race-course (Xen. *Ana.* 4.8.25). In these cases, the word has an almost technical sense, and the aspect of the verb indicates the nature of the commission: the aorist "*epimelêthênai*" for definite commissions, the imperfective "*epimeleisthai*" for matters requiring continuing attention.

[61] Herodotus says that the Parians appointed leaders from the people by looking for the well-tilled fields, "thinking that these men were likely to take as good care of [*epimelêsesthai*] public affairs as they had their own" (5.29.2). See also *Euthyphro* 2d.

[62] At *Rep.* 421d6, Socrates asks, "Does it seem to you that a wealthy potter will still want to pay attention to his craft [*epimeleisthai tês technês*]?"

[63] This claim is made in Socrates' argument against suicide in the *Phaedo*: "I think this is well said, Cebes, that the gods are our caretakers [*hêmôn tous epimeloumenous*] and we humans are among the gods' possessions" (62b).

[64] Described by Smyth 2207.

[65] For example, at 29e, cited above in 1.3.

2.2 Like some of the words often used to translate it, *epimeleisthai* can be used in two senses, each with some different conditions for application—what I will call the *external* sense and the *intentional* sense. To see what I mean, consider the English word "manage" in the sentence, "Alan manages Bob and Carla at Burger King." In this sentence, "manage" can have two senses, and each sense has different application conditions. In one sense (the "external" sense), the sentence is true because Alan has received the appropriate promotion and appointment from the owner of the restaurant. But it need not be the case that Alan does a good job or takes his duties very seriously. Maybe he spends most of his time in the back reading magazines or works the fryer without giving his subordinates guidance. He is the *manager* (it says so on his paycheck), but he is not *managing* the store. In order to qualify as managing in this second sense (the "intentional" sense), different conditions must be satisfied. He has to *do* certain things in the right sort of way. One could imagine, in fact, that while Alan is the *manager* of the store, it is actually Carla who *manages* it.

The same appears to be the case with *epimeleisthai*. The external sense is used particularly in connection with public or official commissions. For example, a sergeant is said to have *epimeleia* for his squad (he has charge of them, we might say).[66] He has received an official commission, and with the commission come certain responsibilities and duties. But he could do a better or worse job of handling it, and it is possible that, on reviewing a particular sergeant's record, a superior officer could say, "You were in charge of these men, but you did not put much effort into it. I am revoking your commission."

[66] At Xen. *Cyr.* 8.1.14. See footnote above.

Plato, however, almost always uses the verb in the second, intentional sense: It indicates not an official appointment or delegation, but an activity, something that one *does*. In *Rep.* I, while arguing against Thrasymachus, Socrates lists "*to epimeleisthai*" as one of the functions of the soul: "Is there some function of a soul that you couldn't perform with anything else, for example, taking care of things, ruling, deliberating, and the like [*to epimeleisthai kai archein kai bouleuesthai kai ta toiauta panta*]?" (353d). The upshot of Socrates' argument here is that a person with a bad soul—one that lacks justice, the virtue appropriate to souls—will necessarily "rule and manage [*archein kai epimeleisthai*]" his life badly and will be unhappy (353e). In this passage, ruling (*archein*) and taking *epimeleia* are closely associated: both are mental functions concerned with living one's life.

2.3 What conditions must be satisfied in order for it to be true of someone that she is taking *epimeleia* for something in the intentional sense? Of what does this mental function consist?

One basic aspect of *epimeleia*, of course, is emotional or affective, what we would call "concern" or "care." This aspect is expressed by its root, *mel-*.[67] A person who takes *epimeleia* for x does so with anxiety or concern with relation to x. She is not just going through the motions. She values x's well-being, and she acts toward x with diligence and attention.

[67] Thus the word "*melô*" (med. "*melomai*"): "to be an object of care or thought, or in act. sense, care for, take an interest in" (LSJ sv. "*melô*").

Epimeleia is also *directed* towards its object. This is why, in many contexts, the best translation of the word seems to be something like "pay attention to" or "devote effort to". Several examples appear in Plato's dialogues: In *Rep.* 4, Socrates wonders if a potter will still "pay attention to his craft [*ethelêsein epimeleisthai tês technês*]" once he has become wealthy.[68] So also, in the *Charmides*, Socrates claims that most diseases are beyond the ability of Greek doctors to cure, because "they neglect the whole [body], which they ought to pay attention to [*hoti tou holou ameloien hou deoi tên epimeleian poiesthai*]" (156e).[69] Both of these passages stress the active effort and attention that someone who takes *epimeleia* gives to the object.[70] The good potter pays attention to his craft and works to do it well; the good doctor pays attention to the whole body, thinks about it, and takes it into consideration in making his decisions.[71]

Sometimes, the noun form, *epimeleia*, refers to the person's attention or diligence itself. For example, in the *Meno*, Anytus is said to have acquired his wealth, not "automatically or as the result of a gift [...] but through his own wisdom and diligence [*alla têi hautou sophia ... kai epimeleiai*]" (90a4-5).[72] (Notice the contrast between things that we *earn* through *epimeleia* and those that come "automatically" or through gifts.) Another

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[68] See also *Rep.* 6, 488d4-5, cited in footnote above.

[69] I've changed Rosamond Kent Sprague's translation of this passage that appears in Cooper. Her translation is, "they do not pay attention to the whole as they ought to do." My change is meant to emphasize the contrast between "*ameloien*" and "*tên epimeleian poiesthai*." *Ameleia* (neglect) is an antonym of *epimeleia*.

[70] Thus the common construction "*tên epimeleian poiesthai*"—*epimeleia* is something you *make* or *do*.

[71] Like "paying attention," taking *epimeleia* admits of degrees. In the *Euthydemus*, when Socrates is being questioned by the sophist brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, he worries that they might stop talking to him if he asks too many questions. For he remembers his lyre-teacher Connus, who "is vexed with me whenever I don't give in to him, and [...] as a result, he takes fewer pains with me [*mou hêtton epimeleitai*] because he thinks I am stupid" (295d3-5, as trans. by Sprague). In this case, "*epimeleitai*" means "pay attention to" or "exert effort over," and Connus exerts less effort over stubborn pupils. Another example occurs in the *Laches*. Lysimachus says of himself and Melesias, "We have thought it best to take care of [*epimelêthênai*] them [their sons] *as much as possible*." Then, a few lines later: "No, we think that now is the time to begin to take care of them [*archesthai autôn epimeleisthai*] *as much as we are able*" (179a4-8, my emphasis).

[72] See also *Laches* 180c5-6; *Phaedo* 107c2; *Rep.* 374e, 467a.

example occurs in the *Charmides*, when Socrates says to Critias, "No doubt you are likely to know this [what it means to say *sôphrosunê* is 'minding one's own business'], on account of [*heneka*] your age and *epimeleia*" (162e1-2). Rosamond Kent Sprague, in her translation, translates *epimeleia* here as "experience," but clearly Socrates means experience only in a special sense. Critias is presumed to be an authority because, Socrates supposes, he has devoted thought and attention to the issue of *sôphrosunê*. In other passages, forms of *epimeleia* are used adverbially, to describe doing something in an attentive, diligent, or careful way.[73]

The most important thing to note about *epimeleia*, however, is that it involves *activity*. Remember, *to epimeleisthai* is something that a person *does*, like *to archein*. It is the actual management or act of *taking care of* or *tending to* the thing in question. Thus, throughout the *Republic*, Socrates discusses the importance of "taking care of the body [*epimeleia tou somatos*]" (407b5-6, 464e6, 498b4-5). The "care of the body" about which he is talking is active management of the body, the program of exercise and training that keeps the guardians in peak physical condition. Shepherds and farmers are two common examples of those who take *epimeleia* for things. In the *Republic*, Socrates uses the notion of "caring for the flock [*epimeleian ... peri poimnia*]" to describe the role of the guardians in the ideal city (e.g., at 451d8-9). They are like shepherds (or, in the case of the soldier class, like sheepdogs) who watch over the herd and manage it to its best interests.[74] In the

[73] There are a couple of examples where *epimeleia* is used adverbially in the *Republic*. In *Rep.* 8, the dative form is used adverbially: Oligarchic cities have many evil-doers, "whom the rulers *carefully* keep in check by force [*hous epimeleiai biai katechousin hai archai*]" (552e1-3, cited above). In *Rep. 5*, a comparative form is used adverbially: Socrates asks, "Should these craftsmen educate their children more diligently [*epimelesteron*] than the guardians?" (467a7).

[74] At *Gorgias* 516a-b, Socrates uses the example of the caretaker (*epimelêtês*) of animals to make a point about Pericles. Is a caretaker good if his animals end up wilder than when he took them over? Obviously

Euthyphro, Socrates ironically compares Meletus to a good farmer, who is "likely to take care of [*epimelêthênai*] the young plants first, and afterwards all the rest" (2d3-4).[75] Both shepherds and farmers *care about* or are *concerned about* their flocks or fields—they value them, are anxious for them, and want them to flourish. But they take *epimeleia*—they *provide care*—only when they take action to make this flourishing happen.

2.4 One particularly illuminating use of "*epimeleia*" occurs in Protagoras' so-called Great Speech in the *Protagoras.* The speech focuses on the role of human *epimeleia* in the development of human virtue. Socrates has expressed doubts that virtue is teachable (319a10-320c1), and, in his speech, Protagoras argues that it is. Protagoras' speech proceeds in two stages: First, he tells his famous myth about Prometheus and Epimetheus and the origin of justice and reverence among humans. This story is meant to suggest that all humans do have a *capacity* for virtue. But Protagoras next has to show that virtue is teachable and doesn't arise naturally. Protagoras explains: "Next I will try to show you that people do not regard this virtue as natural or self-generated [*apo tou automatou*], but as something that is taught and arises as a result of careful effort [*didakton te kai ex epimeleias paragignesthai*] in those in whom it is developed" (323c, my translation). Lombardo and Bell, in their translation in Cooper, translate "*ex epimeleias*" as "carefully," but that does not really capture what Protagoras is saying.[76] He is not claiming that the Athenians are *cautious* in teaching virtue. Rather, he is contrasting two ways that characteristics might

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not, which shows that Pericles, whom the Athenians eventually condemned to death, was not a good caretaker.

[75] Other examples where farmers are said to take *epimeleia* for their crops or fields include Herodotus 5.29.2, cited in a footnote above, and *Rep.* 589b1-3.

[76] I am using my own translations from the *Protagoras* in this section.

come about: Some are natural or "self-generated," while others arise "*ex epimeleias,*" that is, as a result of human effort, attention, or management.[77]

The first bit of evidence that Protagoras produces for his thesis is the practice of reactive attitudes and civil punishments. According to Protagoras, people get angry and want to punish others only when they fall short with respect to characteristics that people come to have "through *epimeleia* and training and teaching [*ex epimeleias kai askêseôs kai didachês*]" (323d6-7). They don't get angry and want to punish people for naturally arising deficiencies, like ugliness and weakness (323d-e). But, in fact, people do get angry and want to punish people for lacking virtue. Protagoras claims that this is because, in fact, anger and punishments are intended as deterrence. By punishing and getting angry with people, we are trying to teach them and the others who see a lesson, to get them to stop acting viciously and to exert more effort to cultivating virtue. If people were unaffected by this sort of lesson, if they could not be made better through human effort, punishment as deterrence would be pointless.

Moreover, Protagoras continues, given the importance of virtue to living a successful life, how can one doubt that parents would "teach [their children] these things and expend all *epimeleia* [*epimelountai pasan epimeleian*] over them?" (325c3-4). Parental practice bears this out. When children are very young, parents make every action and word into a lesson about virtue and nobility (325d). And when the children go to school, the parents tell the teachers to "devote much more *epimeleia* [*polu mallon ... epimeleisthai*]" to their students' good conduct ("*eukosmias*") than to their grammar or cither playing (325d7-e1). So also with the music teachers: "The music teachers too take

[77] Cf. *Meno* 90a4-5, cited above.

epimeleia for their young students' moral decency and that they do nothing wrong [*sôphrosunês te epimelountai kai hopôs an hoi neoi mêden kakourgôsin*]" (326a4-5). Then, after the youths leave school, the city compels them to learn the laws, continuing the process of shaping their lives into the right pattern.[78] Protagoras concludes: "When so much *epimeleia* [*tosautês ... tês epimeleias*] is paid to virtue, Socrates, both in public and private, are you still puzzled about virtue being teachable? The wonder would be if it were not teachable" (326e).

According to Protagoras, people can, through diligence and effort, make a difference in the virtue of their fellow citizens and children. Everyone believes this; otherwise, why would they spend so much time and effort at it? But if everyone, including Socrates' own fellow citizens, believes that virtue is subject to human effort and teachable, it must be true. *Epimeleia* is Protagoras' word for the extensive effort and attention that people expend trying to ensure that their children and fellow citizens have virtue.

We should, however, notice some differences between the kind of *epimeleia* Protagoras is describing and the kind Socrates emphasizes. For one thing, Protagoras is certain that virtue (*aretê*) can be taught. He makes a living by supplementing the education in virtue that conventional practice begins (319a; 328a-c). But Socrates doubts that virtue can be taught. Although he claims that Protagoras' speech has changed his mind, this claim seems to be ironic, since Socrates immediately proceeds to raise problems for Protagoras' views and to call into question whether Protagoras really understands the subject he claims

[78] The laws and other social institutions "compel [citizens] to have *epimeleia* for virtue [*anankazousa aretês epimeleisthai*]" (327d).

to teach.[79] Secondly, and perhaps relatedly, Protagoras seems to believe that it is through the *epimeleia* of *others* that people become virtuous—first through the efforts of our parents and fellow-citizens, then, if we hire Protagoras, through his efforts. Socrates, on the other hand, exhorts people to take *epimeleia* for *themselves*. This difference is important, as I will argue: Socrates wants people to take responsibility for their *own* lives, not to depend on others.[80]

2.5 What we see, then, in examining at the way that *epimeleisthai* and its cognates are used is that *epimeleia* (at least in the intentional sense) essentially involves *activity*. Thus, the parents that Protagoras talks about *do* things to improve their children. They tell them stories. They scold them when they go wrong. They tell the teachers to order their lessons around the goal of imparting good behavior. And they write laws to encourage their children's good behavior when they grow up.

As an illustration, consider a farmer: He takes *epimeleia* for his crops. This means, first of all, that he *values* his crops, *worries* about them, and pays *attention* to them and takes them into consideration in his deliberations. In short, he *cares about* them. But, more importantly, he also takes *actions* with respect to his crops. As we would say, he *provides* care. He exerts effort toward managing them, keeps them properly watered and fertilized, and protects them from animals, insects, and invasive weeds. In so doing, he has a *goal* in mind. He wants his crops to flourish and eventually to produce a good harvest.

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[79] See Kraut (1984), chapter 8 (discussed in my Introduction) for more details.

[80] That is not to say that Socrates does not see value in the traditional Athenian education, as Kraut convincingly argues (see 218-228, 296). But the traditional education can only take you so far (by Kraut's reckoning, only to the first stage of moral development (230-1)).

Socrates is trying to get his fellow citizens to adopt a similar attitude toward their lives. He wants them to take *epimeleia* for themselves, for their souls. That is, he wants them, first, to consider their souls to be things of importance, worthy of and requiring care, attention, and thought. But he also wants them to do something about the state of their souls, to try to make themselves as good and wise as possible—that is, to *provide* care for their souls.[81]

3. Failure to take care

3.1 In this section, I consider the question: How is it that so many people fail to take *epimeleia* for themselves? According to Socrates, almost everyone goes wrong; almost everyone needs to be goaded and reproached by a gadfly like Socrates.[82] How does this happen? What is the problem?

These questions are important for two reasons. First, they reflect an objection that we might well imagine the Athenians making to Socrates' speech. They do not believe that

[81] This account of *epimeleia* makes good sense of what Socrates means when tells people to take *epimeleia* for themselves. The model of the farmer taking care of his crops can be applied to cases like this, where the person is meant to have *epimeleia* for some particular thing or set of things. But what does Socrates mean when he tells people to take *epimeleia* for wisdom or virtue? Wisdom and virtue are universals, and it is not obvious what it means to "take care of" them. Perhaps it means that one should take care that more particulars—among others, your own soul—instantiate those universals. But could one not also *epimeleisthai aretês* by discussing virtue, trying to understand it and how it comes about? If so, one would be taking *epimeleia* for virtue without taking *epimeleia* for any particular thing. Notice, however, that Socrates would not sharply distinguish these two activities. According to him, you take care of yourself partly through thinking about and discussing virtue, wisdom, and truth.

In the end, I think that this usage of the word shows that even "take care of" is not always a good translation. Nor is "tend" (though it does get something more of the sense of the word). The range of meaning for *epimeleisthai* is wider: It means, at its root, exercising concern, attention, and thought *over* something. But the activity denoted by the term could be providing care, or it could be working to promote or working to understand.

[82] Socrates seems to leave it open that some do not fail his examinations: "And *if* he doesn't seem to me to possess virtue, though he claims that he does [...]" (29e5). Perhaps there are some for whom the antecedent of this conditional is not satisfied. But I think it more likely that, like Epicurus, Socrates recognizes that all humans, even the best of us, are in constant need of someone to check our worse tendencies and keep us on track.

they fail to have *epimeleia* for virtue. On the contrary, they would probably accept Protagoras' story about how important they believe virtue to be and how much they do to encourage it in their children and fellow citizens. Protagoras himself, they might argue, makes his living only because we care *so much* about virtue that we pay for his lessons. Most Athenians would scoff at Socrates' claims—as many probably did at his trial.

The second reason to consider these questions has to do with gaining a better understanding what Socrates' mission is. A cure makes more sense if you understand the disease; so also, in order to understand what Socrates is trying to accomplish, we first have to understand the problem he is trying to address. Why do people need his help?

3.2 Socrates describes the basic problem in the *Apology*: People think they understand "the most important things," when in fact they do not (22d). They think they understand virtue, happiness, and what is important. Reeve (1989) calls this mistake "ethical hubris"—the person thinks that he understands ethical matters when he does not (35). There are many versions of this mistake. The dialogues show us many different characters with many forms of hubris about their wisdom. But the basic error is the same.

Why is ethical hubris a problem? Socrates believes that thinking that you know what you do not is one of the greatest errors a person can make—it is the "most reproach-worthy ignorance [*eponeidistos amathia*]" (29b1-2). But this is not obviously true. One of Socrates' fellow citizens might object: "Perhaps I cannot answer your questions, Socrates. But I've been doing pretty well in my life. Why should I change?" Most people do not think that ignorance about such abstruse matters as the nature of virtue and happiness is an

obstacle to living well—particularly given the impossibly difficult and abstract level of knowledge that Socrates seems to demand from his answerers.[83]

Ethical hubris is a problem because, according to Plato, our beliefs about happiness and virtue form the foundation of our motivation. In the *Euthydemus*, the thesis that all people are motivated to pursue happiness is taken to be so obvious as not to require an argument:

> [Socrates to Clinias:] Do all men wish to do well [*boulometha eupraττein*]? Or is this question one of the ridiculous ones I was afraid of just now? I suppose it is stupid even to raise such a question, since there could hardly be a man who would not wish to do well. (278e3-6)

Socrates and Clinias agree that all humans want to do well and to be happy (*eudaimonein*). In other dialogues, Socrates holds that happiness—or the good—is the end for the sake of which we do everything that we do.[84] Virtue (*aretê*) has a similar importance. I think almost all Greeks would agree that at least some form of *aretê* is necessary or at least conducive to happiness.[85] That is the reason that the parents in Protagoras' speech work so

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[83] Stone (1989) objects that Socrates' standards for knowledge were absurdly difficult: "Socrates was asking [his fellow citizens] to pass tests in metaphysics, to prove themselves as logicians. He called them ignorant because they could not cope with the most enduring problems of philosophy" (83). The question of how stringent Socrates' standards for knowledge are and what kind of ignorance Socrates finds in his answerers is a matter of scholarly debate (I find the discussions of this problem by Woodruff (1990), Nehamas (1998) ch. 2, and Brickhouse and Smith (2000) ch. 3 to be helpful). For my part, I think that Stone has a point. We often know things for which we cannot give a discursive account, and we manage to make good decisions because we have the courage to forget our lack of knowledge. But I also think that Stone is being a little unfair. Many of the mistakes that Socrates uncovers are much more basic (and dangerous) than mistakes about metaphysics, as I will show below. Moreover, Socrates holds himself to the same standards as everyone else.

[84] See *Gorgias* 499e7-8: "Do you also think [...] that the end of all action is what's good, and that we should do all other things for its sake, but not it for their sake?" See also *Gorg.* 468b, *Apology* 25d-26a. For a discussion of eudaimonism in Plato's early dialogues, see Irwin (1995), chs. 3-4.

[85] I'm hedging because, of course, non-philosophical person would not likely have any clear or consistent conception of something like virtue or *aretê*. Socrates' success in his elenctic examinations is partly due to these confusions. Nevertheless, I think the Greek conceptual network tends to associate *aretê* with *eudaimonia*. *Aretê* is excellence, the qualities that make some people better and more *eudaimôn* than others. Because of this association, most of Socrates' answerers are unwilling to claim that virtue does not conduce to happiness, even those with the most revisionist views about virtue. (Of course, when they agree that *aretê* is necessary, they sometimes do not mean *moral* virtue.) Callicles redefines justice as the

hard to ensure that their children have virtue—they think that their children will not be able to succeed and live happily without it. In this belief, at least, Socrates agrees.

A person's beliefs about happiness and virtue, therefore, are crucial to the decisions that she makes about what to do and how to live. She makes the choices that she does because she believes that they will lead to her happiness and the happiness of those she cares about. But, because of this, any mistake that she makes about these matters will necessarily infect all of the rest of the choices in her life.

3.3 If these matters are so important, how do so many people get them so wrong? Looking at the dialogues, we can find many explanations for how these errors happen. According to the *Apology*, people think they know what they do not because their success in other endeavors goes to their heads.[86] In other cases, the problem seems to be that people uncritically accept conventional wisdom about virtue and happiness. Many of those to whom Socrates talks answer his questions about virtue with simplistic conventional formulae. Meno, with his catalogue of different virtues for different social positions, is a prime example (*Meno* 71e-2a). People also uncritically accept conventional wisdom about happiness, as revealed by Socrates' reproach that his fellow citizens are more concerned

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arrangement that promotes the happiness of strong; Thrasymachus denies that justice is a virtue. The view that Glaucon explicates in *Rep.* 2 claims that justice is a necessary evil; but it is likely that this view would allow that other (non-moral) virtues, such as cleverness or courage, would allow a person to pursue his full happiness. The idea of *aretê* as other-regarding but self-sacrificing virtue does not come easily to the Greeks.

[86] Socrates describes his experience with the poets: "I saw that, because of their poetry, they thought themselves very wise men in other respects, which they were not" (22c). The craftsmen make the same mistake (22d-e).

about their wealth than their souls. They accept the conventional belief that wealth brings happiness.[87]

Some interlocutors have more sophisticated but no less problematic views about the right way to live. Critias, in the *Charmides*, has definite ideas about what the good life is. He is confident enough in his views that he has spoken about them to Charmides (161c; 162b-d). Yet when Socrates asks him to explain and defend his views, Critias cannot articulate them, and he frequently changes his mind. His ideas sound good, but under inspection they prove to be vague and inconsistent. In other words, it is not good enough to be able to repeat formulae about the good life, even if those formulae are true. You must also understand them, so that you are able to apply them to concrete situations and defend them in discussion.[88] Critias cannot do this.[89]

The fact is that avoiding ethical hubris, living an examined life of the sort that Socrates defends, is a very hard thing to do. It is much easier to go with the flow, not to ask questions, and to accept simple answers. (The advantage of the Kallipolis in the *Republic* is that most people can live well and avoid error without having to think very hard, since the philosopher-kings do most of the thinking and keep all corrupting influences away from

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[87] See also Socrates' first discussion with Clinias in the *Euthydemus* (278e and following). I discuss this passage in the next chapter, esp. § 2.

[88] Socrates sometimes refutes what seem to be his own beliefs, when interlocutors express them in response to his questions. For example, in the *Charmides*, Critias defines *sôphrosunê* (self-control) as self-knowledge, which is apparently a Socratic position (see, e.g., *Alcibiades I*, 131b) (165b-c). Also, in the *Laches*, Socrates refutes an answer given by Nicias, which the general apparently heard from him (194b). For different views about what to make of these episodes, see Woodruff (1988), 105, fn. 28, and Rappe (1995).

[89] The *Alcibiades I* contains an interesting passage that suggests another interpretation of the mistake that people make. *Epimeleia* of the self is an important theme of this dialogue. Near the end, Socrates asks Alcibiades, "What does it mean to have *epimeleia* for oneself?—I'm afraid we often think we're practicing *epimeleia* for ourselves when we're not" (128a). Why not? Because we don't know what our *selves* are. We don't know what we are that need to be taken care of. We confuse ourselves with our bodies, possessions, or reputations, and, as a result, we exert efforts toward making sure that these are as good as possible, while neglecting our true selves—our souls, according to Socrates (130c). (See Chapter 4 for more details.)

the common citizens.) But, according to Socrates, to accept the simple answers is to risk disaster. If Socrates is right about the structure of human motivation, nothing is more important in a person's life than that he have the right views about what is valuable and how to live well and be happy. And yet, according to Socrates, despite the fact that no one (except the god) is truly wise in these matters, people think they already understand them. They take their beliefs about these things for granted, and turn their attention to other matters. But, in so doing, they are like builders founding their buildings on sand.

4. How Socrates can help

4.1 As we can see, then, the problem with most Athenians is not that they do not *care about* virtue and happiness. Socrates knows that they do, and it is an assumption of his psychology that everyone values his own happiness and, to the extent that he believes that virtue is necessary for or promotes happiness, his virtue. But, because of their mistakes and their ethical hubris, they do not take *epimeleia* for their souls or for virtue—that is, they do not *take care* of them; they do not actively engage in trying to understand virtue and their selves and to make their selves as good as possible.

Most people think that these ethical questions are settled and easy to understand. They think they already know the answers. When Socrates shows someone that he does not know what he thinks he knows about virtue, that person discovers that what he previously thought to be settled and unproblematic is really not so. He comes to realize that he does not possess a bit of knowledge that is vital to his success and happiness.[90]

[90] The argument that knowledge of some sort is necessary for happiness is made in all three of the dialogues I consider in this dissertation. But the more or less explicit implication of all three dialogues is that we do not have it.

When and if he realizes this, ideally he will begin to take *epimeleia* for himself and to try to understand these issues more clearly.

Something similar occurs with *epimeleia* of the soul: Before meeting Socrates, people do not think of their souls. Instead, they worry about wealth, reputation, and influence. Socrates shows them that the state of their souls, on which their enjoyment of these other things depends, is not as secure as they think.[91] For one thing, they believe false things, and to that extent their souls are not as they should be. For another, their souls are focused on the wrong things and are motivated by mistaken values. By showing them their errors, Socrates gets them to realize that the health of their souls is a problem to which they need to devote *epimeleia*.

4.2 As an illustration, let's consider, once again, the farmer. He knows generally what he wants: a good harvest. But in order to attain his goal, he needs a clear and specific idea of what he wants to achieve and how to get it. One thing that he has to know is which of the plants growing in his fields are weeds and which crops—which of the many small green things growing in his field are worth attention and which are not. But imagine a farmer who is so confused about farming that he has it all backwards. He confidently pulls out all the crops and ends up with a field filled only with weeds, never imagining that he is frustrating his own purposes. According to Socrates, the Athenians are like this confused farmer. They have their values backwards; they value and exert *epimeleia* over the things

[91] Socrates shows them that "Wealth does not bring about virtue, but it is virtue that makes wealth and everything else, both public and private, good for a man" (30b2-4).

that should come second—like wealth and possessions—while neglecting more important things such as the state of their souls.

There are two ways to help a farmer in this position. The best thing would be to have an expert farmer who could explain the art of farming and convince the farmer to change his practice.[92] But what if no expert farmers are available? In that case, we'd need someone who at least could see that the farmer's current practice wasn't working. That person could confront the farmer, ask him about his beliefs about farming and their foundations, and show him that he does not even know *how* to be a farmer. Before he is confronted, the farmer does not realize he is doing anything wrong. After being confronted, he sees that the foundation upon which he built his occupation is flawed.

Notice, however, that showing the farmer his ignorance helps only so much. Now he sees that he was wrong, but what is he supposed to do? If possible, someone (possibly the person who confronted him) should now help him to discover the right way to farm. Perhaps this person knows some small things about farming, which he can help the farmer

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[92] According to Irwin (1977) and Kraut (1984), the best-case scenario, for Socrates, would be to have a moral expert whom we could follow. According to Irwin, "The expert in a particular craft offers authoritative advice, supported by a rational account; and Socrates argues that we should seek someone equally authoritative in morals" (71). This view also forms an important part of Kraut's interpretation. He writes, "I take Socrates to believe that if there ever are moral experts, then they alone should have political power; they should give commands to the other citizens, and these commands ought to be obeyed" (233). Nehamas (1999), ch. 2, however, suggests that the problem of finding and consulting a moral expert is much more difficult than it is for experts in a *technê* like farming. For one thing, Socrates believes that "the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being" (*Apology* 38a5-6). But if living well requires examination, it would seem that a life of mindlessly following the orders of a moral superior would not be a good one (41). The second and more serious problem involves how to find a moral expert in the first place. Nehamas says: "Even if we agree that moral experts do exist, it still would not be clear that we could recognize them independently of the fact that their arguments in favor of these views, their reasons for living as they did, were *convincing*" (41). But "[this] involves accepting the conclusions of these arguments as well as the methods by which the arguments reach their directions for how to act. And what, in turn is this? Is it not a way of saying that one has become, at least to that extent, a moral expert, a virtuous agent, oneself?" (45). That is, if there were any moral experts, they could make themselves known only by making others into moral experts. It is for these reasons that I say that the expert farmer needs to convince the would-be farmer how to farm. He does not give the other an instruction guide to follow uncritically. He helps his student to see the reasons behind what he does, so that the student becomes an expert himself.

to understand. Maybe he can show the farmer some strategies for discovering which plants are crops, like a test that identifies weeds. They could work on the problem together, along with other confused farmers.

4.3 This is, I argue, Socrates' position in Athens. He is not a moral expert who can set people straight. As he says at the beginning of the *Apology*, he does not have the ability to teach virtue to anyone (20c). We have seen no reason not to take him at his word; he is not a hidden expert.[93] But, unlike most people, he has discovered his own lack of wisdom and, in so doing, has gained "human wisdom" (20d). He also sees that his fellow citizens lack this humility, and so he has made it his mission to try to impart human wisdom to as many of them as he can. This part of his mission is accomplished through the activities that I have called examination and showing. He shows people their ignorance not only because he knows that the god wants humans to be free from hubris, but also because, without his help, they would be ruining their lives without knowing it.

But, as in the case of the farmer, exposing ignorance is only part of the story. After all, what is a person supposed to do when Socrates shows him that he is ignorant? If he does not understand the most important things in life, he will have no direction, no idea of how to proceed or how to attain the happiness that he desires. Indeed, it is not much more help to tell the person that he needs to pursue wisdom: Without some guidance, he will not know *how* to do it or what he is looking for.[94] Therefore, whatever little he can learn

[93] Socrates never claims to be a moral expert, not even in dialogues like the *Republic* in which he is more dogmatic. (The *Republic* is full of hedging and disclaimers.) I discussed the arguments of Kraut (1984) in my Introduction, but see also Reeve (1989), ch. 1, and Irwin (1995), esp. § 16.

[94] This is the problem in the second Socratic section of the *Euthydemus*; see Chapter 2. In the (possibly pseudo-Platonic) dialogue *Clitophon,* the character Clitophon (who appears as a defender of Thrasymachus

about virtue, happiness, wisdom, and how to attain them, no matter how rudimentary and provisional, will be invaluable.[95]

Moreover, if Socrates only refuted people, he might justly have been convicted of harming the city and corrupting the youth.[96] In the *Republic*, Socrates discusses this very danger, when he proscribes the youth of the ideal city from practicing dialectic:

> We hold from childhood certain convictions about just and fine things; we're brought up with them as with our parents, we obey and honor them. [...] There are other ways of living, however, opposite to these and full of pleasures, that flatter the soul and attract it to themselves but which don't persuade sensible people, who continue to honor and obey the convictions of their fathers. [...] And then a questioner comes along and asks someone of this sort, "What is the fine?" And, when he answers what he has heard from the traditional lawgiver, the argument refutes him, and by refuting him often and in many places shakes him from his convictions, and makes him believe that the fine is no more fine than the shameful, and the same with the just, the good, and the things he honored most. (538c6-e1)

Having come to be in such a condition, the youth is likely to give up his belief in the values of his parents, and, "from being law-abiding he becomes lawless" (539a). If Socrates'

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in the *Republic* (I.340a-c)) advances the following critique against Socrates: Even if Socrates' arguments "can really rouse us as if we had been sleeping" (408c3-4), we can still ask what good they are: "What are we to make of Socrates' exhorting of us to pursue virtue? Are we to believe that this is all there is and that it is impossible to pursue the matter further and grasp it fully? Will this be our lifelong work, simply to convert to the pursuit of virtue those who have not yet been converted, so that they may in turn convert others? Even if we agree that this is what a man should do, should we not also ask Socrates, and each other, what the next step is?" (408d1-e1). According to Gonzalez (2002), Socrates' answer would be that there is no next step—Socrates' pursuit of wisdom, his dialectic, itself *is* wisdom, virtue, and the good life: "Socrates is claiming, not that elenctic examination in search of virtue *promises* to produce a great good for us, but rather that *it is itself our greatest good*" (180). It is true that Socrates seems to say something like this when he claims that the life of discussing virtue is the best life for a human being (*Apology* 38a). But it is unclear to me how Socrates would defend this claim, if it were taken in the strong sense that Gonzalez suggests. What is so good about this life? Gonzalez suggests, "Dialectic [...] is the art that, while producing no product of its own, enables us to critically evaluate and thus make proper use of the different goods we possess" (176). But how would it do that? Would it not need some further standard (e.g., a standard for good and evil) in accordance with which it could judge how to use things properly? Perhaps the proper use of our assets is in a life of philosophical discussion; but that still needs to be shown.

[95] This is one reason that I think that a skeptical interpretation of Socrates' mission, on which he *only* exposes ignorance, must be wrong. Another reason is the fact that Socrates so often seems to espouse positive views about virtue. *He* does not seem to think that his mission is limited to exposing ignorance.

[96] Thus Stone's accusation: "He had taught these youthful tyros, mere beginners in beardless wisdom, an easy way to make laughingstocks of the leading citizens" (82).

discussions with his fellow citizens are limited to negative elenctic examinations, it is likely that something like this would often be the result.

But, if we look at Socrates' own account, we have no reason to believe that he does limit his discussions to negative elenctic examinations. In fact, he says that he does something that, as I have argued, *sounds* very different: He exhorts people to take *epimeleia* for their souls and for virtue. Taking *epimeleia* involves not just being concerned about or caring about one's soul and virtue; indeed, as I suggested above, people probably already do this. It also involves taking active steps, doing what one can to *understand* virtue, to *improve* one's soul, and to make oneself more virtuous.[97] As I discussed in § 1.3, showing people their ignorance can be a way of exhorting them to take *epimeleia*. But Socrates can do more.

Luckily for Athens, Socrates (as he is depicted in Plato's early dialogues) is not without resources to get his fellow citizens (at least, those who are willing to listen and participate) started on the right track.[98] Like the one who confronts the farmer, he could start by trying to get the person to whom he is talking to consider and perhaps accept

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[97] Moreover, genuine *epimeleia* for oneself (rather than for one's possessions or reputation) requires doing things that actually improve the self. Think again of the farmer: Is it true of him that he is taking *epimeleia* for his crops if he is really tending only weeds? That is, one may fail to take *epimeleia* for something without realizing it. (Cf. *Alcibiades* I, 128a: "I'm afraid we often think we're taking *epimeleia* for ourselves when we're not.") In this sense, perhaps *epimeleisthai* is a sort of success term. It is true of someone that she is taking *epimeleia* for x only if she succeeds in engaging in activities that provide care for what really is x; she does not take *epimeleia* for x if she provides care for what she falsely believes to be x.

[98] As I mentioned in a footnote above, it may be the case that very few *are* willing and able to follow Socrates. It may also be the case that, as Plato moved through his career, he became more and more skeptical about how many people really could appreciate and benefit from philosophical speculation: In the *Apology*, Socrates claims to talk to "anyone I happen to meet, young and old, citizen and stranger" (30a). The early dialogues show him talking to many kinds of people. But, by the time the *Republic* is written, Plato restricts philosophical dialectic to a very small class, and only to those of a certain age. The interlocutors of later dialogues are generally more philosophically competent figures like Theaetetus. (Of course, I am only speculating. Is the *Republic*'s Kallipolis even comparable to the Athens in which the Socrates of the early dialogues works? The two cities pose very different problems for nurturing philosophy, and those different problems may necessitate different strategies.)

whatever he believes about virtue.[99] Then he could show the person strategies for dealing with the problems and discovering new truths, what we would call "philosophical tools." Finally, if all else goes well, he and his answerer could engage cooperatively in philosophical inquiry into the nature of virtue, to try to understand better what it is and, if possible, how to attain it.

4.4 In the subsequent chapters of my dissertation, I will trace how Socrates is shown engaging in this very sequence of activities in three dialogues, the *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, and *Alcibiades I*. Each of these dialogues may have been written later in Plato's career.[100] But there is evidence of what I say even in the dialogues that are generally agreed to be earliest,

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[99] The possibility that Socrates has positive views that he might want to convince others raises a whole host of interpretive problems: What is the status of Socrates' beliefs? How do we reconcile these beliefs with his disavowal of knowledge? How does he come by them? Do his elenctic cross-examinations provide him with support for his beliefs, and how might these cross-examinations serve to convince others of his view? The main lines of this problem are represented in the debate between constructivists and non-constructivists about the Socratic elenchus. In short, the debate is as follows: Constructivists (like Vlastos (see 1994a, b)) say that Socrates' elenctic arguments are meant to support or even prove Socrates' theses about virtue against the theses put forward by his interlocutors. Non-constructivists (the prime example being Benson (1987), (1995), and (2000)) argue that, because of the formal structure of the arguments together with Socrates' own requirements upon the interlocutors, Socrates cannot mean his arguments to support any conclusion except that the interlocutor has an inconsistent set of beliefs and so does not know what he claims to know. Benson's argument is a serious challenge for anyone who wants to hold that Socrates' arguments have constructive results. But I think weaker claims about the elenchus than Vlastos' can be defended against Benson's argument. My claim here is only that, in recognizing his ignorance about ethical matters, the interlocutor (ideally) will accept the following proposition: I need to think about (or, more strongly, take *epimeleia* for) these things. After all, does Polus really think that Socrates has *proved* that doing injustice is worse than suffering it (Vlastos' case)? More likely, he is puzzled and does not know how to proceed. To put it another way, I think that Socrates' primary goal is not to convince his interlocutors of the truth of what he says; it is to engage them in philosophical reflection. I also agree with some of the things that Brickhouse and Smith (2000) say about this issue. According to them, Socrates' elenchus may not *prove* his views. But it does reveal conceptual connections, costs and benefits of holding different views, and to that extent offers the interlocutor *reasons* for changing his view. See also Woodruff (2000), for a different interpretation of the function of Socratic cross-examination.

[100] I do not intend to speculate about the order of the dialogues or to place them in groups; I am convinced that such an exercise is both futile and not ultimately of much interpretive value. But many chronologies of Plato's dialogues place the *Euthydemus* and *Lysis* in the "transitional" period between the early and middle dialogues (or, at least, late in the early period), whereas many scholars consider the *Alcibiades I* to be spurious. My view is that there is no conclusive reason to suppose that the *Alcibiades I* is spurious. Moreover, even if it is, its author expresses views that likely originated from Plato and his discussions with his students in the Academy, in response to the very problems that I am considering.

indicating that this picture of Socrates' mission is not a later development, but a component of Plato's understanding of his character from the beginning of his career.

For one thing, as many scholars have noticed, even as Socrates says, "I am very conscious that I am not wise at all" (21b4-5), he also frequently seems to claim or imply that he knows things about virtue.[101] How can Socrates say that he "know[s] practically nothing [*ouden epistamenôi hôs epos eipein*]" (22d1), but still claim to know so many things? This is the *disclaimer-of-knowledge* paradox, and scholars have spilled prodigious amounts of ink trying to resolve it.[102]

The most common solution to the paradox is to distinguish two kinds of knowledge, one of which Socrates disclaims while he claims the other. Reeve (1989) gives one such account. According to Reeve, Socrates disclaims "expert craft-knowledge of virtue," a kind of knowledge that would be explanatory, teachable, and luck-independent, meaning that its success or failure would not be subject to luck or chance (37-45). But Socrates does have some "nonexpert knowledge," which includes knowledge of *acceptable propositions*—propositions that everyone would be hard pressed to deny—and of some *unacceptable propositions*—which Socrates discovers to follow from the acceptable ones, though most people would, on first glance, deny them (45-53). Unlike expert craft-knowledge, nonexpert knowledge is not certain, but only *elenchus-resistant* (52). Through his inquiries, Socrates has discovered that some of his beliefs resist being refuted through elenctic discussion.

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[101] Many of these passages occur in the *Apology*, most prominently: 22c-e, 29b, and 37b.
[102] On Socrates' claims not to have knowledge, see Gulley (1968), Vlastos (1994b), Lesher (1987), Woodruff (1990), and Brickhouse and Smith (1994), ch. 2.

Whether or not the details of Reeve's picture are correct, it seems to me that, as a general solution, it must be correct. If so, it has two important consequences for my argument. First, it shows that, despite his lack of a comprehensive, explanatory knowledge of virtue that he could teach to others, Socrates does (in some sense) know some things, which he could, through dialogue, lead others to see as well.[103] Socrates does not, as the hidden expert interpretation holds, have complete answers to his questions—there is still a lot that he does not understand. But he has made some progress on the search. Second, it shows that Socrates has a strategy for discovering new truths about virtue and other important matters—that is, for taking *epimeleia* for virtue and thereby for his soul. He does so by, as he says, "discuss[ing] virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others" (38a). Socrates is not satisfied with merely reconfirming his *lack* of knowledge. He wants more.[104]

4.5 Other early dialogues confirm this picture of Socrates. In the *Crito*, Socrates is faced with a morally significant decision: Should he bribe the guard and break out of prison, or stay and face execution? Socrates does not avoid the decision by claiming ignorance; he engages Crito in a discussion about the problem, and they agree to "examine the question together" (48e). Socrates says, "Not only now but at all times I am the kind of man who listens to nothing but the argument that on reflection seems best to me" (46b). In order to find which argument is best, what is the right thing to do, they must discuss it.

[103] Socrates, of course, would deny that he *teaches* these things, but he may still intend to persuade others of them.
[104] So I lean toward a mild constructivist interpretation of the elenchus.

Even Plato's "aporetic" dialogues, when examined closely, support the idea that Socrates is working to learn more about virtue. These are the dialogues that end in *aporia*—that is, in an impasse, where all of the solutions to the question have been refuted and no way forward is in view. It might seem that the aporetic ending of these dialogues supports the skeptical picture of Socrates. Human pretensions to knowledge have been refuted, and we are left knowing nothing but our own ignorance. But this simplistic view of the *aporiai* ignores the important and not always negative results that the discussions accomplish. Moreover, Socrates often does not seem to think that the *aporia* ends the discussion. Near the end of some prominent aporetic dialogues, Socrates says things like the following:

> So we must investigate again from the beginning what piety is, as I shall not willingly give up before I learn this. (*Euthyphro* 15c)
>
> And, not paying any attention to what anyone might say, let us join together in looking after both our own interests and those of the boys. (*Laches* 201b)
>
> I do ask, like the able speakers in the law courts, that you think over everything that has been said. (*Lysis* 222e)
>
> Now, Protagoras, seeing that we have gotten this topsy-turvy and terribly confused, I am most eager to clear it all up, and I would like us, having come this far, to continue until we come through to what virtue is in itself, and then to return to inquire about whether it can or cannot be taught. (*Protagoras* 361c-d)

In each of these cases, despite the fact that the discussion has ended at an impasse, Socrates wants to continue talking and thinking about the problems. It is the others who are unwilling or unable to keep trying.[105]

[105] In the *Laches*, the characters agree to meet again; in the *Lysis*, Socrates tells Lysis and Menexenus to keep thinking about the problems. We do not know, in either case, what happened. But it is clear that some people continued to talk to Socrates on multiple occasions: The friends who were at his trial and who joined him in the prison before his death. Thus Xanthippe's one line in the *Phaedo*: "Socrates, this is the last time

5. Conclusion: The examined life

5.1 Perhaps the most famous line in the *Apology* is the gnomic aphorism that Socrates pronounces as he is deliberating his counter-penalty: "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being [*ho de anexetastos bios ou biôtos anthrôpôi*]" (38a5-6).[106] Of course, we (and the jurors) might wonder: What is the examined life? And why is an unexamined life not worth living? Many people are rather content not examining their lives, and it is not obvious that they would be better off if they did. How is Socrates providing the "greatest benefit" to the citizens by forcing their lives to be examined?

If Socrates is right, we need to be examined because many of our beliefs about the most important things are wrong or confused. Through his examinations, Socrates demonstrates to his fellow-citizens what they might not otherwise believe—that virtue and the state of their souls are problematic and worth their attention and concern. The dialogues show that most people are pretty complacent about virtue and the nature of happiness. They accept conventional teachings or convenient platitudes and turn their attention to what they believe to be more important matters. They care about being successful, but they think that success comes from external things. All of their effort, care, and attention—in short, their *epimeleia*—therefore goes to collecting wealth, building their

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your friends will talk to you and you to them" (60a). No doubt Xanthippe knows that Socrates talks to his friends a lot!

[106] Goldman (2004) discusses this claim. He argues that Socrates is deliberately following a long Greek tradition of gnomic aphorisms from wise men (4-14). He also discusses the meaning of the key term, *exetazein* (as in "*anexetastos*"); he says, "the answer to the question about Socrates' use of *exetazein* lies in seeing its significance in relation to military preparation and order in battle. [...] The original military sense of the word is still felt. Socrates has 'inspected' the three classes of politicians, poets, and craftsmen" (26-7). Thus, according to Goldman, the "examined" life is one in which one position or station has been reviewed, like a soldier in the ranks. Goldman does not say much about why this is important, but I think his idea can be given some content by considering the importance, for Socrates, of self-knowledge, in the sense of knowing your place in the overall scheme of things. See my Chapter 4. Cf. also Tarrant (2000) on the significance of the fact that Socrates describes himself using "*exetazein*".

reputation, or pursuing political influence. They think they are thereby taking *epimeleia* for themselves, but they are wrong. They think they are working toward happiness, but they are wrong about what happiness is and are thus moving in the wrong direction.

Socrates and his questions upset the foundations of these activities. At first, of course, people do not like having their foundations upset. Many become angry. Others feel confused, as if they'd been touched by a torpedo fish (*Meno* 80a-b). Not surprisingly, most are not willing to give up what they believe in, to take the hard road that Socrates is offering them. But the challenge is there: In order to get what they want, they must change the priorities of their lives and realize that they cannot have good or successful lives without thinking about the issues Socrates raises. For those who are willing to take up the challenge to take *epimeleia* for their souls and for virtue, Socrates stands ready to help.

Epistemic modesty, all by itself, is a good thing. Realizing one's own ignorance makes one cautious, and less liable to blunder confidently into mistakes.[107] For most of Socrates' fellow-citizens, epistemic modesty probably is the only benefit that Socrates can hope to provide.[108] But passive epistemic modesty is only second best; far better is to have a direction, something to *do* to get closer to living a better life. An active *philosophical* life of discussing virtue with others and examining oneself and others provides that direction. Given the worthlessness of human wisdom, such a life is the best and most worthy one that a human can live.[109]

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[107] See *Euthydemus* 281c, discussed in the next chapter: "If [a man with little wisdom] did less, would he not make fewer mistakes; and if he made fewer mistakes, would he not do less badly, and if he did less badly, would he not be less miserable?"

[108] Socrates says that he directs his attentions to "anyone I happen to meet" (30a). But that does not mean that he has the same level of success with each.

[109] Plato's views about human life are founded on two assumptions that I find questionable. The first is that human wisdom really is worthless. This assumption underlies Plato's doubts about the ability of common

5.2 In the subsequent chapters, we'll look at how Socrates pursues his mission in three dialogues, the *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, and *Alcibiades I*. The common feature of all of these dialogues is that Socrates has in them interlocutors who are more willing than most to pursue philosophy. Unlike characters in other dialogues, these characters are young, less set in their ways, and more eager to learn. In each case, we'll see Socrates following the pattern I have discussed in this chapter. Socrates shows them the difficulty of the important questions of life. But he also guides them to approach those questions actively and philosophically. Moreover, I will argue that Plato seeks in similar ways to engage his readers in this life.

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people to live good lives and to participate in government, and his privileging of epistemic modesty. But I think human wisdom is remarkably good, if we approach it critically and listen to what it says. Second, I do not agree with his caution. We have only one life to live, and the question of how we live it is immediate and pressing—refusing to commit oneself to a set of values is in itself a choice and commitment. Even if we do not know what we are doing, even if we might go disastrously wrong, we have to take the risk. I do not know to what extent Socrates or Plato is guilty of this last. Socrates is capable of making decisions on important ethical matters (as in the *Crito*). But Socrates' caution may also have made him unwilling to do some things, like speaking in the Assembly against Athenian injustices during the Peloponnesian War.

Chapter II:

Socrates' Exhortation to the Love of Wisdom in the *Euthydemus*

0. Introduction

In the *Apology*, Socrates claims that one of his primary purposes in Athens has been to exhort his fellow citizens to change their priorities and to take *epimeleia* for themselves and for virtue.[110] But the *Euthydemus* is one of the few dialogues (if not the only one) where Socrates explicitly describes what he is doing in these terms. In this dialogue, the sophist brothers, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, claim to be able to teach virtue (*aretê*) (273d). Naturally, Socrates wants to see, and so he asks them to give a partial demonstration and to persuade his young friend Clinias "that he ought to love wisdom [*philosophein*] and take *epimeleia* for virtue [*aretês epimeleisthai*]" (275a5-6).[111] But when the sophists don't perform up to Socrates' standard, he offers to give his own "unprofessional and ridiculous" demonstration of "the protreptic skill [*hê protreptikê sophia*]" (278c).[112] Socrates eventually demonstrates the skill in two parts (278c-282d and 288d-292e), each constituting a different phase of his exhortation. My purpose in this

[110] In this chapter, I will continue to leave *epimeleia* and its cognates partially untranslated.
[111] All translations from the *Euthydemus* are my own.
[112] Many commentators contend, and I agree, that Plato's purpose in the dialogue is to contrast his own Socratic philosophy or dialectic and sophistic eristic. (They disagree, of course, about what the contrast is supposed to be.) See, e.g., Scolnicov (1988), McCabe (1998), Chance (1992), Teloh (1986), Friedländer (1964). Chance, in particular, claims that Plato "actually depicts eristic as *the* antithesis to dialectic, in fact, as the very paradigm of otherness" (19). If I had space in this chapter, I would say more myself about this contrast and what it tells us about Plato's views about protreptic. But, if I did that, this chapter would become a dissertation of its own. So I'll have to leave this issue to be explored another time.

chapter is to analyze Socrates' efforts in these passages—what strategies does he use? What does he hope to accomplish, and what changes does he attempt to effect in Clinias? And how does Plato, through the dialogue, seek to effect similar changes in the reader?

This chapter falls into the following main sections. I begin by analyzing Socrates' arguments with Clinias about the nature of happiness, in particular, his arguments about good fortune (*eutuchia*) (§ 1), and about the relative importance of wisdom and other goods for happiness (§ 2). Then, in §§ 3-4, I address an interpretive problem with the latter argument, and I argue that the main lines for interpreting it in the secondary literature are misguided. Commentators often read this passage for evidence of Plato's views about the value of virtue and other goods in relation to happiness, but I argue that Plato is not trying to defend a worked-out position here. On the contrary, Socrates' principal aim is to incite Clinias to pursue wisdom, and so he does not intend to support his stronger claims with adequate arguments. Instead, he uses the strong claims to provoke Clinias to examine the issues farther. I argue that Plato has similar purposes with respect to his readers. He has Socrates advance bold but weakly supported conclusions in order to engage and challenge his readers, while at the same time providing a sort of research proposal for future philosophical enquiry.

Socrates' first protreptic conversation serves two purposes: It makes explicit and then undermines Clinias' unexamined beliefs about happiness and what he needs to live well, and it inspires him with a desire to get wisdom (*philosophia* in the sense of the *love* of wisdom). But, as Socrates himself points out (282e), getting the boy to *love* wisdom is only the first stage of transforming his life. Clinias' love needs a direction; he needs to know what to do in order actually to *get closer* to wisdom. In § 5, I show how Socrates, in his

second protreptic conversation, engages Clinias in the actual *practice* of philosophy and teaches the boy some of what we would call philosophical tools for making actual progress in philosophical inquiry.

1. Happiness and good fortune

1.1 In the previous chapter, I argued (in § 3.2) that, according to Plato, our beliefs about happiness and virtue constitute the motivational foundation of our lives.[113] We do what we do because we believe that it will make us happier and allow us to live better lives.[114] So the best way for Socrates to get a motivational grip upon his interlocutors (and indeed, for Plato to get a grip on his readers) is by engaging with beliefs connected to their conception of happiness. This is Socrates' strategy with Clinias in his first protreptic conversation. He engages with Clinias' (unexamined) beliefs about happiness and its sources, and he argues that these beliefs are mistaken, and that, on the contrary, Clinias can become happy only if he pursues wisdom.

Socrates begins by drawing out Clinias' beliefs about happiness. All humans, Socrates says, want to live (or do) well ("*boulometha eu prattein*") (278e3).[115] This is so

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[113] Indeed, I cited the passage from the *Euthydemus* that we're about to look at. I do believe, however, that this is a consistent theme in Plato's work, especially in the dialogues that depict Socrates engaged in elenctic cross-examinations. Socrates consistently targets beliefs that are foundational for his interlocutors in the sense that they are bound up with their core beliefs about their lives and about what makes (or would make) their lives good and happy ones. In subsequent chapters, I argue that this is the case in the *Lysis* and *Alcibiades* I.

[114] This is the basic assumption of eudaimonism. On eudaimonism in Plato, see Irwin (1995), §§ 35-36. An excellent account of eudaimonism in Greek ethical theory (particularly focused on Aristotle and Hellenistic philosophy) is provided by Annas (1993b), esp. Ch. 1. Annas defends a eudaimonist interpretation of Plato in her (1999), Ch. 1.

[115] Through the passage, Socrates appears to treat these *eu prattein* and *eudaimonein* as equivalent. *Eu prattein* is used in his initial question, at 278e3, but he shifts to *eudaimonein* at 280b6: "For we agreed, I said, that if we should have many good things, we would be happy [*eudaimonein*] and live well [*eu prattein*]." After 280b6, the two terms appear to be used interchangeably.

I've preferred the translation "live well" for "*eu prattein*" because I think that this is the connotation that it has in this context and in which it is equivalent to *eudaimonein*. Think of the English, "How are you

obvious that "it is stupid even to raise such a question, since there could hardly be a human who would not wish to live well" (278e5-6). The real question is, given that we want to live well and be happy, how are we to do so? What makes us happy? Socrates suggests, and Clinias agrees, to three claims:

T1. A person does well if he has many good things ("*ei hêmin polla kagatha eiê*"). (279a2-3)
T2. Good things include: (a) being rich, being healthy, being handsome, and having a sufficient supply of bodily goods; (b) noble birth, power, and honor in one's city; (c) sound-mindedness (*sôphrosunê*), justice, and bravery; and (d) wisdom. (279a-c)[116]
T3. Good fortune (*eutuchia*) is the greatest of the good things. (279c7-8)

Socrates suggests that most people would find these claims obvious, and Clinias agrees readily. Indeed, together they represent something like the conventional wisdom about what it is to live well: You need to have lots of good things (T1, T2), but for the most part it is a matter of good fortune (*eutuchia*) whether you have them or not (T3). After all, consider Socrates' list (T2). Many of these items we either have or fail to have because of our birth and upbringing. If you are lucky (or favored by the gods), you'll be born to a wealthy, noble family in Athens or the United States. If you're not, you can look forward to a short, dreary life as a slave among the Macedonians or in a slum in Africa. To a great extent, fortune fixes our chances for happiness before we can do anything about it.

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doing?" "I'm doing well." We do not mean that we are correctly or excellently performing some task (compare: "How are you doing the dishes?" "I'm doing them well."); we mean that we are happy, our lives are going well.

[116] I've separated out the goods into categories—(a), (b), (c), and (d)—because this is how Socrates presents them. He asks Clinias about the (a) items, gets Clinias' assent, then the (b) items, and so on. I've preserved this separation because there does seem to be some significance to the different categories. (Goods under (a) are bodily goods while (b) goods are those connected to *timê,* perhaps?) The most significant separation, for my purposes, is between (c) and (d). That Socrates puts wisdom into a different category as the other virtues shows that he is *not* here presuming (as some commentators have claimed) that all virtues are essentially wisdom. In fact, as the argument progresses, Socrates suggests that the (c) virtues are more like (a) and (b) goods than they are like wisdom. Bravery and sound-mindedness are included among the things that can be used well or badly, depending on whether they are guided by wisdom (281c).

Fortune has an effect on how our lives turn out subsequently, as well. Suppose you decide to make a trading journey to Meletus. You may make the journey safely and reap huge profits. But you may also run into an unexpected storm or pirates. The outcome of your voyage, like the circumstances that made it possible to take the voyage in the first place, is at least partly determined by the outside forces: the gods, the Fates, or random chance.

Claims T1-T3 therefore characterize a distinctive and plausible view about the nature and sources of happiness, a view to which many Greeks, including Clinias, subscribe.[117] Socrates, however, argues that none of these three claims is quite right. He wants Clinias to question this conventional view and to adopt a more sophisticated attitude about happiness. His first target is T3.

1.2 If I am right about what T3 means and the outlook on happiness that it represents, we can see why Socrates would try to challenge it. He wants Clinias to take *epimeleia* for himself and to practice philosophy. But, as I argued in the previous chapter, taking *epimeleia* for oneself is a long and difficult process, and its benefits are far away and hard to perceive (Ch. 1, §§ 4.3, 5.1). If you believe that your happiness is out of your hands, that it is a matter of good fortune, you won't be willing to exert that kind of effort. Socrates therefore needs to convince us that our happiness *is* up to us—or, at least, that it depends upon us more than upon the things we get from fortune.[118]

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[117] Greek myths and tragedies often espouse this view about human life. The fate of the Trojan War hangs on the actions of gods; Odysseus wanders for many years away from home because of the anger of Poseidon; and Oedipus cannot escape the terrible fate that has been prophesied for him. In each case, the choices and actions of the protagonists play some role in what happens to them; but their fates are ultimately in the hands of higher, not necessarily benevolent powers.

[118] In this connection, I would compare this argument to what Socrates says about his suggestion, in the *Meno*, that learning is recollection: "I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would

Socrates' argument against T3, however, is odd, for numerous reasons.[119] For one thing, Socrates' strategy is strange—he doesn't try to refute T3 directly, but instead, he argues that it is superfluous. Good fortune needn't be added to T2's list of goods, he contends, because wisdom is good fortune, and wisdom is already on the list. "By putting good fortune in our previous list," he says, "we are now saying the same thing all over again" (279d2-3). But what does that mean? Is he saying that wisdom and good fortune are identical?[120] This would, indeed, be a strong claim. But Socrates' arguments and examples do not seem to establish identity. They suggest something else—that, as Socrates puts it, "wisdom in every case makes men fortunate [*eutuchein poiei tous anthrôpous*]" (280a6); or, later, "knowledge seems to provide men [...] with good fortune [*eutuchian* [...], *hôs eoiken, hê epistêmê parechei*]" (281b2-3). For these reasons, I think the apparent identity claim must be elliptical, and Socrates really means to say that good fortune *necessarily comes* to a wise person.[121] It is *wisdom* that makes a person fortunate, not anything else.

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contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better people, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it" (86b-c).

[119] McPherran (2005) discusses some of the puzzles concerning the argument and offers his own solution. Dimas (2002) sees the passage as a key for understanding the protreptic passage as a whole, and Reeve (1989) uses it in his argument that the kind of wisdom that Socrates is looking for is, among other things, *luck-independent* (see esp. §§ 1.7, 3.4). But other commentators pass over it, as too puzzling to be worth worrying about. Annas (1999), for example, says in a footnote: "Here I do not discuss the puzzling section of argument from 279C to 280B" (40, n 30).

[120] McPherran explains the identity claim as follows: "Because *all* events are guided by wisdom, there are no chance events [and, thus, such a thing as 'fortune' in [one sense]]; but there is still 'good fortune' [in another sense], and *it* is identical to wisdom" (58). It is hard to see what he means by this, but the argument seems to be that the supposed "fortune" which makes things turn out well for us is identical to the wisdom of the gods, divine providence. The idea is interesting, but I see little direct evidence for it in the passage. Socrates says nothing about gods in his arguments or examples.

[121] In this, I agree with Irwin (1995), Reeve, and others. But, as McPherran points out, the non-identity interpretation has its own problems, because it fails to account for Socrates' strong claims that "in putting good fortune in our previous list we are now *saying the same thing all over again*" and "it is ridiculous, when a thing has already been brought up, to bring it up again and *say the same thing twice*" (279d2-3, 4-5, my

If this is right, it may mean that our happiness is determined by *us*, not by the gods or the Fates or random chance. In order to become fortunate and happy, we need to become wise.

1.3 By my reckoning, Socrates produces two distinct arguments for his conclusion. The first argument uses a series of examples to show that it is wise (that is, skilled) people that enjoy the best fortune. In the first three examples, Socrates appeals to the good fortune that skilled individuals enjoy in their areas of expertise. Wise aulos players, writing masters, and pilots, Socrates says, have the best fortune in their respective crafts (279e). But wise people not only have better fortune themselves; they also bring better fortune to others. The wise general shares better fortune with his soldiers, and the wise doctor brings better fortune to his sick patients than an ignorant one (279e). In general, Socrates concludes, "it is more fortunate [*eutuchesteron*] to do things with a wise person than with an ignorant one" (280a4-5). Therefore, "wisdom [...] makes men fortunate in every case" (a6).

The schematic form of the first argument is as follows. Premises P1 and P2 are the general points that Socrates seems to be making with his examples:

P1. For all persons S, if S is wise with respect to area G, S will have the best fortune in G (or, depending on the example, S will have better fortune in G than someone who is not wise). (Supported by *epagôgê* from the aulos-player, writing master, and pilot examples.)[122]

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emphasis). These statements seem to indicate that wisdom and good fortune are two names for one thing. If so, how is it that wisdom "makes men have good fortune" or "provides good fortune" (281b)? Certainly if x and y are identical, it is true that having x *makes you have* y or *provides you with* y. But that is not what seems to be going on in the examples.

[122] For an excellent discussion of Plato's use of *epagôgê* (imprecisely translated as "induction"), see Robinson (1953) Ch. 4.

P2. For all persons S and T, if S is wise with respect to area G and T depends on S in G[123], T will have the better fortune in G (than T would with someone who is ignorant). (Supported by *epagôgê* from the general and doctor examples.)

Socrates concludes that wisdom makes men fortunate. Given the premises, he must mean:

C1. For all persons S, if S is wise with respect to area G, S and all persons who depend on S in G will have good fortune in G.[124]

The second argument is conceptual, and it comes after Socrates states his conclusion at 280a6: "For [*gar*] I don't suppose that she [wisdom] would ever make any sort of mistake but must necessarily do right and be fortunate [*orthôs prattein kai tunchanein*]—otherwise she would no longer be wisdom" (280a7-8). Thrasymachus makes a similar argument in *Republic* I, when he claims that a ruler, insofar as he is a ruler, never errs. Insofar as any craftsman is skilled in his craft, Thrasymachus says, he does not make mistakes, and when he does, he is in that regard no craftsman (*Rep.* 340e). Socrates' point here is similar. It is the nature of wisdom, Socrates thinks, that a perfectly wise person makes no mistakes in the area of his wisdom:

P3. If S is wise with respect to area G, S makes no mistakes in G. (Follows from the nature of wisdom: If S makes a mistake in G, S is not wise in G to the extent that S makes mistakes.)

I'll call P3 the *Infallibility Assumption*. But Socrates needs another assumption to secure his conclusion, namely:

P4. If S does not make mistakes in G, S will have good fortune in G. (Assumption)[125]

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[123] This is an awkward way of expressing the idea illustrated by the examples. In the second set of examples, the person in question (who I am calling T) depends upon someone else (person S) for his health and safety. The soldier depends upon the general; the patient upon the doctor. Socrates' point is that, in such cases, T would prefer that person S be wise with respect to that area in which T is depending upon S.

[124] As I will argue below, this argument is not valid. See below, § 1.4.

[125] P4 is barely stated, if at all. (Perhaps it is implicit in the conjunction, "*orthôs prattein kai tunchanein.*" Doing correctly (not making mistakes) *goes together* with getting what you want.) But P4 is clearly needed to fill the gap between P3 and C2. Socrates' point that "otherwise she would not be wisdom" seems to support only P3, not P4. I discuss the plausibility of P4 below.

C2. If S is wise with respect to area G, S will have good fortune in G. (From P3 and P4)

Notice that C2 claims less than C1, insofar as it says nothing about the fortune of those who depend on S. But C1 entails C2. The point of both arguments is the same.

1.4 How good are Socrates' arguments? Have they given us sufficient reason to give up the conventional view? I argue that they have not, for two reasons. First, though Socrates has made an important point about the value of wisdom, he has equivocated on the key term, *eutuchia*. As a result, his arguments do not engage with the conventional view's strongest intuitions. Second, even if we grant the terms of Socrates' arguments, the strong conclusion that he wants to draw does not follow.

I begin with the first point. We have a cliché that says something like the conclusion for which Socrates is arguing. We say (often about sports) that skilled people make their own luck. I think this cliché has some truth to it. For example: Suppose that it is the World Series, and Luis Gonzalez is batting against Mariano Rivera. Rivera throws one of his trademark cut-fastballs, and Gonzalez makes an awkward-looking swing and manages somehow barely to get his bat on the ball. The ball is not going far. But it just floats over Derek Jeter's head into the outfield, and the winning run comes in to score. Now, we'd be tempted to say that Gonzalez was lucky, but then someone could say, good players like him make their own luck. It looks like this person is agreeing with us, but in fact, he's not. He's saying: Gonzalez was not lucky at all. His hit *appears* lucky, but really it isn't. Gonzalez is a good hitter, and because of his skill, he was able to do something the rest of us would have to be very lucky to do.

If this is Socrates' point, it is a good one. His examples—the pilot, general, and doctor—illustrate that when it comes to many things, success comes from *skill*, not random chance or any outside factors. Moreover, your skill allows you to overcome many adverse circumstances that other people cannot handle. A really good pilot, for example, might have to deal with an old and leaky ship, a lazy crew, and a stormy voyage, but he'll make the best of his circumstances, he'll avoid making mistakes (P3), and, in the end, he'll have the best chance of completing his journey successfully. An unskilled pilot, on the other hand, won't be able to master his circumstances, and so his success will be much more at the mercy of luck.

Our analysis of this situation, however, would be similar to our analysis of the Gonzalez case: To the extent that the pilot's success is due to his skill, he is not actually *lucky*. He only *appears* lucky to someone who does not understand what he is doing. *Real* good and bad luck occur only when the results *fail* to meet expectations, when they are because of something other than skill. For instance, suppose *I* bat against Rivera. If I get a hit (it's a remote possibility!), we would say that I was fortunate or lucky. (Just like a dopey pilot who somehow makes it to Meletus.) But when Gonzalez gets a hit, it's not (primarily) because he's lucky; it's because he's good. On the other hand, if Gonzalez goes hitless for several games despite hitting the ball hard to all fields, that's a central case of *bad* fortune. It is bad fortune because his skill is intact, but he is not getting the expected results. Our cliché is therefore an ironic way of saying that a skilled person's good results are not lucky or fortunate at all, but are due to his skill.

Now, Socrates' Greek term, *eutuchia*, does not mean quite what the English terms 'good fortune' or 'good luck' mean. Sometimes, *eutuchia* means nothing more than

'success' or 'prosperity.'[126] In this sense, it means something like "doing well at obtaining (cf. *tunchanô*) good things" and implies nothing about how the good results happen. If Socrates is using *eutuchia* in this sense (as he must be), his arguments are somewhat more convincing. In particular, on this reading, premises P1 and P2 become quite plausible. Wise or skilled people *are* more successful (perhaps statistically speaking) than the rest of us. But then *eutuchia* becomes vacuous as a supposed constituent of *eudaimonia* or *eupragia*, both of which already mean something like 'success.' As the baseball example illustrates, when conventional wisdom holds that *eutuchia* is the greatest of goods, it means something else: a divine favor or random benefit *in contrast to* what we get by our own efforts.[127] Socrates is therefore equivocating on the term '*eutuchia*.' He gives arguments that show, to some extent, that wisdom brings *eutuchia* in the sense of 'success'. But they do not show that the *eutuchia* mentioned by T3 is guaranteed by wisdom.[128]

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[126] 'Fortune' or 'good fortune' can also have the sense of 'success' or 'prosperity,' as in the sentence, "He is going out to make his fortune." I do not think, on the other hand, that 'luck' can ever be used this way (except ironically, as in the cliché I mentioned about). For this reason, 'good fortune' is a better translation of *eutuchia* than 'good luck.'

[127] The LSJ etymology of *tuchê* supports this interpretation: *tuchê* is "what man obtains (*tunchanei*) from the gods" (s.v. *tuchê*). In other words, it is what we get from external sources, as opposed to what we get through our own efforts or skills. Cf. also Xenophon (*Mem.* III.ix.14): "When someone asked Socrates what he thought was the best pursuit for a man, he answered, Doing well. Questioned further, as to whether he thought good luck [*eutuchian*] a pursuit, he said, On the contrary, I think that luck [*tuchên*] and doing [*praxên*] are opposites. To hit on something right by luck without search I call good luck; to do something well after study and practice I call doing well; and those who pursue this I think do well" (cited by Reeve (1989), p. 39, fn. 49).

[128] In Aristotle, we can see that the role of external goods and *eutuchia* (in the sense of external prosperity) in happiness is a live issue in Greek philosophical discussions. In *Nic. Ethics* I.8, Aristotle writes:

> Yet, evidently, as we said, [happiness] needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. [...] As we said, then, happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition; for which reason some identify happiness with good fortune [*tên eutuchian*], though others identify it with virtue. (1099a31-b9)

Notice that Aristotle clearly uses *eutuchia* in connection with external goods. The people to whom Aristotle refers in the last sentence—those who identify happiness with good fortune—are Socrates' target. Socrates (or Plato) may be one of those who "identify it with virtue." Aristotle's own view is that neither position is correct. He thinks that *eudaimonia* consists in a complete life of rational action in accordance with virtue but requires a modest amount of external goods. This issue became a topic of great debate in Hellenistic philosophy.

1.5 Moreover, even if we suppose that *eutuchia* means 'success,' Socrates' arguments do not work. The problem with Socrates' first argument is that there is logical gap between its premises and its conclusion. P1 and P2 claim that a wise person will have the most *eutuchia* ("*eutuchestatoi*" (279e2)), or better *eutuchia* ("*eutuchesterous*" (e5), "*eutuchesteron*" (280a4)) than someone less wise or ignorant. In other words, the frame of reference is comparative. But, C1 claims that a wise person will enjoy *eutuchia simpliciter*, with no comparison. But it does not follow from the fact that someone is more successful or fortunate than others or the most successful of a group that she has been successful, in absolute terms. Perhaps nobody is really successful, but the wise person is simply the least unsuccessful of the bunch. Therefore, P1 and P2 are not sufficient to establish C1.

Here's another way of making the same point: We can think of many cases where a skilled person's success is determined, in part, by factors out of his control.[129] For example, suppose a doctor does everything right, but his patient dies because of circumstances out of his control. He's not a bad doctor, but in this case he hasn't succeeded. Skilled doctors do succeed *more often* than unskilled ones (as P1 and P2 suggest). If you were a patient, you'd prefer a skilled doctor. But they nevertheless do not *always* succeed, no matter how skilled they are. Some patients are just hopeless.

An analogous objection applies to the second argument. The first premise, P3, seems plausible to me. I am willing to grant that a perfectly skilled person will not make

[129] Of course, the truth of this claim depends on what we mean by "success." Is a person successful if he does everything right, even if he fails to achieve his objective? The Stoics believed that success or happiness in life should be judged, not by whether we achieve the "targets" (*skopoi*) of our activities, but by whether we act correctly—that is, virtuously—in aiming to achieve them. But I think that, for the most part, it is more plausible to say that success in an endeavor is defined by whether or not it achieves its goal. If the *goal* of medicine is to heal, a doctor whose patient dies has not succeeded, despite his best efforts.

mistakes when it comes to her skill.[130] But, as we see in the case of the doctor, avoiding mistakes does not necessarily guarantee success, because outside factors could interfere. In other words, the skilled person could fail due to *bad luck*.

Premise P4 may be seen to address this objection, by saying that if a person makes no mistakes, he'll have *eutuchia* (success). But this is just to assert what is to be proved.[131] The question at issue is whether avoiding mistakes guarantees success and happiness, or whether a mistake-free performance could still fail due to outside factors. The more vulnerable the success of our endeavors is to luck, the more likely we are to think that good luck *is* the greatest of goods.

1.6 In fact, how vulnerable a skill is to luck depends on the skill. Some skills are such that mistake-free performances guarantee success. Others are not. An example of the former is basic arithmetic. So long as you know basic arithmetic, you can solve any basic arithmetic problem. Now, perhaps no human can multiply very large numbers without help. But that is because no human is perfectly skilled. An arithmetic god could do it.

Most skills, however, are not like arithmetic. Their success depends, to a greater or lesser extent, on things outside of the skilled person's control, that is, on luck. Consider backgammon, for example. In backgammon, you need some skill in order to succeed.

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[130] It is true that, in everyday language, we do not suppose that a person is wise *only if* she is infallible. We allow for occasional mistakes. For example, consider a skilled doctor who, at the end of a very long day, happens across a person needing her help. Because she is so tired, she makes a mistake. Would we therefore deny that she is skilled? I am not sure, but the Infallibility Assumption (P3) still seems right to me. Regardless of how we talk, we can still imagine a person who is *perfectly* (superhumanly?) wise or skilled who never makes mistakes and always does the best thing available to her to do. If she makes mistakes (because of fatigue, inattention, or something like that), I am inclined to say, with Plato, that *at that time* or *in that respect* she is not perfectly wise.

[131] Socrates may not be guilty of begging the question as blatantly as I've suggested. Remember, it is not clear from the text that Socrates asserts P4. But P4 is necessary to get from P3 to the conclusion, C2, so it needs to be there, one way or another, or the argument from P3 to C2 is simply invalid.

But since the moves are determined by dice rolls, you also need luck. Consequently, a lucky human could beat even a backgammon god, if, by chance, the human got great rolls and the god got terrible ones. Skills differ, therefore, with respect to their luck-dependence.[132] The extent to which the outcome and success of a skill is in the skilled person's control depends upon the nature of the skill in question.[133]

What kind of skill is the wisdom in which Socrates is interested—what we might call the skill of living? We cannot answer this question until we know more about what this skill or wisdom is and what it aims to do. What is it that makes us happy? What does it mean to be happy, anyway? What does happiness look like? So far, we do not know the answer to these questions. Neither, in fact, does Socrates: In the second half of the dialogue, Socrates and Clinias investigate the nature of the wisdom we need to become happy (282e; 288e), and they fail to find it (292d-e). The investigation ends in *aporia*.

Socrates' argument, therefore, fails to support his strong, counterintuitive claim about *eutuchia*, and it appears, from the rest of dialogue, that he does not yet have the resources to do so. Nevertheless, Socrates does make some important points about the issue at hand. I would say that the conventional wisdom, that *eutuchia* is the greatest of goods, begins to look less plausible when we recognize the extent to which a wise person

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[132] Perhaps Socrates would deny that backgammon playing and other skills that depend on luck are the sorts of things he is talking about. But then I would want to know what he *is* talking about. My point is that we have not been given a characterization of wisdom and happiness that would allow us to determine whether wisdom is luck-independent. In any event, Socrates' examples (medicine, generalship, etc.) seem to commit him to accepting that *some* kinds of wisdom are not luck-independent.

[133] One strategy that interpreters take when Socrates asserts something without providing an adequate argument for it is to infer the theory that Socrates or Plato must have in order for him to believe that the assertion is true. In § 4 below, I call this the Reconstructivist interpretation: It reconstructs the theory that lies behind Socrates' unsupported assertions. Dimas (2002) and Reeve (1989) take this approach. Dimas uses Socrates' strong claim about luck as a datum in his attempt to reconstruct Socrates' conception of happiness (see, e.g., p. 5). Reeve uses this passage as a key part of his argument that Socrates believes that the expert craft-knowledge of virtue is luck independent. See §§ 1.7, 3.4.

can, through wise decisions, minimize the impact of fortune on his life. Wisdom allows us to avoid mistakes, and our own mistakes play a big part in keeping us from happiness (so Socrates argues later—see below). Although the argument eventually proves insufficient to establish its strong conclusion, therefore, it points to questions that need to be asked. As we'll see, Socrates' longer argument against T1 and T2 follows a similar pattern.

2. Wisdom and conventional goods

2.1 After disposing of T3, Socrates turns to T1 and T2. The argument proceeds as follows.

Remember, according to T1, living well is a matter of having good things. But Socrates argues that more is required. Just *having* things is not enough. For one thing, Socrates says, good things only make us happy if they benefit us:

P5. S's possessing T2 items makes S happy only if the items are beneficial (*ôphelon*) to S. (280b7-8)[134]

But, as Socrates continues, our possessing things would benefit us only if we put them to use. He produces several examples that illustrate this point:

P6. In the cases of a person with food, a workman with materials, a carpenter with tools and wood, and a person with money, the person in question will get no benefit from the things he possesses if he does not use them. (280c-d)
C3. T2 items possessed by S are beneficial to S only if S uses them.[135] (*Epagôgê* from P6)

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[134] One of the challenges of talking about this argument is deciding what to *call* all these things the value of which Socrates is distinguishing from the value of wisdom. Irwin (1986) calls them "external goods;" Bobonich calls them "Dependent Goods;" Reshotko calls them "NGNBs [neither good nor bad things]," Dimas calls them "facilitators." I'll just call them "T2 items," by which I mean, all of the items listed under T2 (a), (b), and (c) (but not T2 (d), which is wisdom).

[135] Notice that C3 should apply to wisdom just as much as to other goods. Like wealth or carpentry tools, wisdom (or virtue, for that matter) is of no advantage if it is not used. Remember Aristotle's similar point about virtue in *Nic. Eth.* Book 1: Virtue alone cannot be the end of human life, since "the possession of virtue seems actually compatible with being asleep or life-long inactivity" (1095b32-96a1). Of course, there is no textual evidence that Plato recognizes that this is the case.

Notice that P5 and C3 together already entail that T1 is not quite right. Doing well or being happy cannot be the *mere* possession of goods. At the least, the goods must also be put to use.[136] The carpenter's hammer does him no good if sits in the toolbox; so also our wealth does us no good if we do not put it to use, either by buying things with it or investing it.

But just *using* the good things is still not enough. As Socrates points out,

P7. T2 items possessed and used by S are beneficial to S only if S uses them *correctly* (*orthôs*). (280e3-4)

But what brings about correct use of goods? Once again, Socrates appeals to examples:

P8. In the case of carpentry, utensil-making, and using health, wealth, and beauty, knowledge (*epistêmê* = *sophia*) is necessary and sufficient for correct usage (281a-b).[137]

C4. In every case of acquisition or possession (*ktêsis*)[138] or action, knowledge (*epistêmê*) produces correct usage and well-doing (*eupragia*).[139] (281b2-4) (More precisely: S uses T2 items correctly if and only if S has knowledge or is wise.) (*Epagôgê* from P8)

Therefore,

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[136] Bobonich objects to this point. For one thing, he says, "certain Dependent Goods have at least some value apart from their use," as, for example, the pleasures that are constituents of a good life. Moreover, "for other goods, there seems to be no plausible way to give sense to the notion of using them." For example, how does one "use" the happiness of others? But the happiness of others is good. So, Bobonich concludes, cashing out the importance of wisdom in terms of its ability to use Dependent Goods seems hopeless (114-5).

[137] The language Socrates uses implies that knowledge is both necessary ("nothing brings about right use except knowledge") and sufficient ("knowledge produces the right method") for correct usage (281a). Socrates had said something similar at 280a: "Wisdom makes men fortunate in every case, since I don't suppose that she would ever make any sort of mistake but must necessarily do right and be fortunate—otherwise she would no longer be wisdom." In other words, wisdom, insofar as she is wisdom, makes no mistakes but always acts correctly.

[138] '*Ktêsis*' is ambiguous between 'acquisition' and 'possession.' Socrates may mean 'possession,' since he had earlier been talking about the possession of goods. But he did not use cognates of *ktêsis* in those passages, but the constructions "*hêmin polla kagatha eiê*" (279a2-3) or "*hêmin agatha polla pareiê*" (280b5-6), literally "many good things are present for us." So Socrates probably means 'acquisition.' Furthermore, when Socrates uses *ktêsis* later in the dialogue, he clearly means 'acquisition' as a process.

[139] At this point, *eupragia* seems to be merely synonymous with "correct usage" or "correct action," given the examples, in P8, that Socrates uses to support C4. It is possible that he is exploiting the other sense of *eupragia*—doing or living well (cf. *eu prattein* = *eudaimonein*)—in order to insinuate a claim that knowledge alone is sufficient for happiness. If so, he is making a jump.

C5. S's possessing T2 items makes S happy only if S has knowledge or is wise. (Unexpressed, but follows from P5, C3, P7, and C4)

C5 effects Socrates' first and weakest revision of T2. C5 does not claim that any of things conventionally believed to be good (listed in T2) are *not* good. But one of them, wisdom, turns out to have a special importance for happiness. According to C5, we *must* possess wisdom or knowledge if we are to be happy.[140]

Notice that, if Clinias believes C5, Socrates' apparent purpose, convincing Clinias of the value of wisdom, would be done. The boy would believe that wisdom was necessary for happiness, and he'd want to pursue it. Moreover, the argument for C5, what I'll call the *core argument* of the passage, presents Socrates' strongest argument for his position.

2.2 Socrates, however, wants to drive the point home. So he argues next that, without wisdom, T2 items are actually *worse* for us than their opposites.[141] He makes a similar point early in the passage, when he introduces the idea of correct usage:

P9. "Now I suppose there is more harm done if someone uses a thing wrongly than if he lets it alone—in the first instance there is evil, but in the second neither good nor evil." [Precisely: If S uses item x incorrectly, more harm is done than if S leaves x alone.] (280e5-281a1)

The main argument, however, rests on a slightly different idea. Socrates says,

> In heaven's name [...] is there any advantage in other possessions without good sense [*phronêsis*] and wisdom?[142] Would a man with no sense profit

[140] C5 entails that wisdom is *necessary* for happiness. Taken together with C4, C5 does not seem to leave much room for those who deny the necessity of wisdom for happiness (like Brickhouse and Smith 2000). C4 certainly seems to deny that anything other than wisdom (such as true belief or luck) *could* produce correct usage and *eupragia*. For example, you do not just accidentally use a hammer correctly and build a house. You have to know what you are doing. The same apparently goes for the wisdom that guides life.

[141] By "opposites [*tôn enantiôn*]" (281d6-7), Socrates means what would conventionally be considered the "opposite" of the conventional goods of T2. Thus, poverty is the opposite of wealth, sickness the opposite of health, and so on. The argument that the "opposites" are better for an ignorant person is therefore quite shocking. Who would think it would be *better* to be ugly, sick, and poor?

> more if he possessed and did much or if he possessed and did little? Look at it this way: If he did less, would he not make fewer mistakes; and if he made fewer mistakes, would he not do less badly; and if he did less badly, would he not be less miserable [*athlios*]? (281b4-c3)

But T2 items allow one to do more, while their opposites allow (or force) one to do less. If you are wealthy, for example, you can do more things than if you are poor. The same goes if you are courageous or self-motivated. These apparently good things allow you to do more. But, when you're ignorant, that's bad! You end up making more mistakes, and doing worse in your life than if you hadn't done anything. So, paradoxically, if you are ignorant, it is actually better for you to have *fewer* T2 items and more of their opposites. That is:

P10. If S is poor, weak, held in dishonor, cowardly, not self-controlled, lazy, slow, or dull of sight or hearing, S does less than he would if he were rich, strong, held in honor, courageous, self-controlled, industrious, quick, or keen of sight or hearing. (281c-d)
C6. If S has fewer T2 items (if S has their opposites), S does less. (*Epagôgê* from P10.)[143]
P11. If S is not wise and does less, S makes fewer mistakes than if S does more. (281b-c)
P12. If S makes fewer mistakes, S does less badly. (281c)
P13. If S does less badly, S is less miserable. (281c)

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[142] In this passage, Socrates introduces another near-synonym in addition to *epistêmê* and *sophia*: *phronêsis*. Why does Socrates keep changing his terminology? Sprague (2000) suggests that Plato is contrasting Socrates' concern for the thing itself (whatever it might be called) with the sophist brothers' exclusive focus on specific words. The sophists insist on using the same words, so that they can draw their interlocutors into apparent contradictions. Socrates does not care as much about the words, so long as he can gain more understanding of how things are. I think an additional reason that Socrates does not insist upon the same terminology is that he does not yet *know* what the thing to which he is referring is. Until we know what it is, how do we know which word (*sophia*, *epistêmê*, or *phronêsis*) describes it best? Cf. Aristotle's lengthy discussion of different intellectual virtues in *Nic. Eth.* Book 6.

[143] Presumably, the opposite is also true: If S has more T2 items, S does more.

It seems to me that C4 should read, "If S has fewer T2 items, S is *likely* to do less" and "If S has more T2 items, S is *likely* to do more." Presumably, Socrates is supposing that, given human nature, being wealthy, honored, and so forth will lead a person to do more. He'll have more self-confidence, motivation, and opportunity. But P9 suggests that a person *can* "leave these things alone," so to speak—that he can have them and yet resist the temptation to do more.

C7. If S is not wise and has fewer T2 items (has their opposites), he will do less badly and be less miserable than if S were not wise and had more. (281b) (From C6, P11, P12, and P13)

C7 strengthens Socrates' case about what Clinias' priorities should be. Before he has wisdom, he shouldn't even *try* to get more of the other goods, because, contrary to what most people believe, they will actually make him miserable. At least, he should, as P9 suggests, leave them alone. (After all, what do you do if you already have wealth, honor, and good-looks?) For a young man of noble birth, like Clinias, this is a radical conclusion.[144]

2.3 So far, the interpretation of Socrates' argument is fairly straightforward. Socrates casts doubt on T1 and T2, and he shows Clinias that he has reason to put aside other activities and pursue wisdom. At 281d-e, however, when Socrates summarizes the argument and its conclusions, things get more muddled. The problem is that, in giving his summary, Socrates seems to change the terms. He shifts from talking about what will make us happy or miserable, to talking about what things are good and bad. Worse, he makes apparently contradictory claims, within the space of a few lines. How are we to make sense of this? The passage in question is worth quoting at length:

> So, to sum up, Clinias, I said, it seems likely that with respect to all the things we called goods in the beginning, the correct account is not that in themselves they are good by nature, but rather as follows: if ignorance leads [*hêgêtai*] them, they are greater evils than their opposites, to the extent that they are more capable of complying with a bad master; but if good sense and wisdom lead, they are greater goods. By themselves [*auta de kath' hauta*], however, neither sort is of any value.

[144] Socrates argues for a similarly radical conclusion with Alcibiades in *Alc.* I. He has more trouble convincing the ambitious Alcibiades to accept it than the rather pliable Clinias. Nevertheless, according to Nails (2002), Clinias was Alcibiades' cousin (at some remove) and thus a member of a noble family.

It seems, he said, to be just as you say.

Then what is the result of our conversation? Isn't it that, of the other things, no one of them is either good or bad, but of these two, wisdom is a good thing and ignorance a bad thing? [*tôn men allôn ouden on oute agathon oute kakon, toutoin de duoin ontoin hê men sophia agathon, hê de amathia kakon*;] (281d1-e5)

In this passage, Socrates sums up his lesson twice, once in the first paragraph, then again, in the second. In the first, Socrates appears to endorse the following conclusions:

C8. (a) If S is ignorant and uses T2 items, the items become greater evils than their opposites. (b) If S is wise and uses T2 items, they become greater goods than their opposites.[145]

C9. By themselves [*auta kath' hauta*] T2 items are neither good nor evil.

Now, since Socrates has shifted from focusing on what makes us happy to what is good or bad, it is not clear how these conclusions follow from the argument that came before. Socrates must be thinking that things are good or bad to the extent that they promote either happiness or misery. So, according to the argument P10-C7, T2 items, when possessed by an ignorant person, promote his misery. They allow him to do more (they "are more capable of complying with a bad master"), and, in doing more, he makes more mistakes and becomes more miserable. That, presumably, is *why* they are "greater evils" than their opposites, in C8(a). If this reading is right, C8(a) follows (somewhat indirectly) from C7.

In order to derive C8(b), on the other hand, we need more, because Socrates hadn't said much before about how T2 items affect the life of a *wise* person. Socrates may be supposing that an argument analogous to the P10-C7 argument can be made about the wise person, as well. That is, T2 items enable him do more, but since he is wise, it is *good* that he do more, and he is happier for it. (Bill Gates has more money, so he can do more

[145] I presume that "If ignorance [or wisdom] leads [*hêgêtai*] them" is an elliptical way of saying, "If a person is ignorant [or wise] and he uses them."

good things in the world—both for himself and for others—than I can.) The T2 items are thus "greater goods" for a wise person because they are more capable of complying with their *good* master, more capable of making him happy and enabling him to do good things.

C9, in turn, appears to follow from C8. According to C9, T2 items, *in* or *by themselves* (*auta kath' hauta*), are neither good nor bad. That is, as C8 says, their goodness or badness *depends* upon their being used by wisdom or ignorance; they have value only when conjoined with wisdom or ignorance. Left "by themselves," however, their value is neutral. (Remember P9: If T2 items are "left alone [*eai*]," they are neither good nor evil.)

2.4 The first paragraph of Socrates' summary, then, does not pose too many problems. We have to do some work to figure out the reasoning, but it seems to follow from what went before. But the second paragraph, where Socrates gives the "result of our conversation" a second time, makes things more difficult. That's because he seems to be making different claims, namely:

C10. *No* T2 item is either good or bad.
C11. [Only] wisdom is a good thing, and [only] ignorance is a bad thing.[146]

The problem is that C10 and perhaps C11 (if my added 'only's belong) appear directly to contradict C8. According to C8, T2 items are sometimes "greater goods" (and, *ipso facto*, good). But C10 says they are neither good nor bad. Surely Socrates would not contradict himself in such a short space. How do we resolve the contradiction?

[146] Socrates does not say "only" in this passage. But he does later say, "wisdom is the only existing thing which makes a man happy and fortunate" (282c9-d1), and "Clinias and I of course agreed that nothing is good except some sort of knowledge [*agathon* [...] *ouden einai allo ê epistênên tina*]" (292b1-2).

The interpretation of this passage is a point of disagreement in the secondary literature. A lot seems to be at stake as well. That's because C7-C10 make important claims about the comparative importance of wisdom and other goods to human happiness. If C10 and C11 express Plato's position on these issues, we can place him in the larger debate about these questions that occupied later Greek philosophers. He'd be on the side of the Stoics, against Aristotle and the Parapatetics. But if we are to use this passage as evidence for Plato's position, we need to know how strong the conclusions are supposed to be, and *how* he came to hold the position that he does, what reasons support it.

2.5 Interpretations of this passage that seek to resolve the apparent contradiction fall into three basic camps. For convenience, I'll call them the *Safe Interpretation*, the *Proto-Stoic Interpretation*, and the *Reconstructionist Interpretation*. The Safe Interpretation is defended by Vlastos (1991) among others.[147] It claims that it is C8 and C9 that express Socrates' (or Plato's) true view, and we need to read C10 and C11 as saying the same thing. According to the Safe Interpretation, Plato is *not* claiming that *only* wisdom (or virtue) contributes to happiness—other goods also contribute to happiness of a wise person.[148] The Proto-Stoic Interpretation is defended by Annas (1993a). Annas claims that Socrates means to defend C11 in its strong form, and, what's more, he has good reasons for holding the stronger, almost Stoic thesis.[149] Finally, Irwin (1986) advances a Reconstructivist

[147] In particular, Vlastos (1991), ch. 8. Sprague (1962), Chance (1992), Brickhouse and Smith (2000), Reshotko (2001), and Parry (2003) have similar interpretations.
[148] Vlastos holds that the other goods make only a very small contribution to happiness, in comparison with virtue, and so virtue is still the decisive, "sovereign" value. See below, § 3.1.
[149] Long (1996), Ch. 1, is sympathetic to the Proto-Stoic interpretation, but he focuses on how the passage was probably read by early Stoics, and he is cautious in his assertions about what Plato meant by it. Gill (2000) agrees with Annas' interpretation, against Vlastos' (see esp. p. 136).

Interpretation.[150] The Reconstructivist agrees with the Proto-Stoic that C11 expresses Socrates' position. But he thinks that Socrates' argument is insufficient. Therefore, he thinks we need to infer, that is, to *reconstruct,* Socrates' (or Plato's) other views in order to make good on the strong claim. I consider each of these interpretations in the next section.

3. Three interpretations

3.1 The Safe Interpretation. Vlastos' discussion of this passage comes in the context of his examination of Socrates' views about the relationship between happiness and virtue. According to Vlastos, Socrates holds the thesis of the "Sovereignty of Virtue," which he explains as follows:

> Whenever we must choose between exclusive and exhaustive alternatives which we have come to perceive as, respectively, just and unjust or, more generally, as virtuous and vicious, this very perception should decide our choice. [...] Virtue being the sovereign good in our domain of value, its claim upon us is always final. (210-11)

But what, Vlastos wonders, is the value of things besides wisdom? Are virtue and happiness identical, so that virtue is the only consideration that we weigh in rational choice, the only good? Or does Socrates think that virtue is only *sufficient* for happiness, but that other goods nevertheless contribute in some way to the virtuous person's happiness (as "mini-components")? (214-6). In other words, does Socrates believe that happiness has only one component, virtue, or many components, of which virtue is the most important?

Vlastos appeals to Socrates' discussion with Clinias as evidence. He contends that Socrates' argument and, in particular, his conclusions, C8 and C9, support the view that

[150] As I noted above, Dimas (2002) also defends a sort of reconstructivist interpretation. Reeve (1989) also pursues this strategy, in a more limited way.

happiness has many components. After all, according to C8, wealth and so on are "greater goods" when used correctly (228). But Vlastos recognizes the apparent conflict I've mentioned, between C8 and C10-C11. His solution is to reinterpret C10 and C11 in light of C8-C9. Vlastos explains, "If we read the expression 'either good or evil' [in C10] as a contraction of 'either good [just by itself] or evil [just by itself]' perfect sense will result, [and] its entailment by what was just said [in C8 and C9] will be assured" (230). So, according to Vlastos, C10 simply restates C9. The (missing) qualification "by themselves [*auta kath' hauta*]" is implicit in C10. Therefore, Socrates does think that T2 items are good and contribute to happiness when used wisely.[151]

Unfortunately, Vlastos' interpretation rests uneasily with what Socrates says and argues later in the dialogue, in his second conversation with Clinias.[152] At 292b1-2, clearly referring to this earlier passage, Socrates says, "Clinias and I of course agreed that *nothing is good* other than some sort of knowledge [*agathon* [...] *ouden einai allo ê epistênên tina*]" (my emphasis). Then, a few lines later, Socrates says that the supposed goods a ruler provides his city "appeared to be neither good nor evil" (292b7).[153] That's why those supposed goods—making the citizens rich and free and peaceful (292b)—cannot be the proper product of the statesman's craft (*technê*), at least if that craft is the one we need to

[151] Reshotko and Brickhouse and Smith also take this approach. Reshotko accepts C8 as Socrates' final view, and she understands C9 and C10 to be saying the same thing, namely, that T2 items (what she calls NGNB things) "are not infallible contributors to happiness" and therefore not good (in *that sense* of good). Brickhouse and Smith (2000) explain, "When Socrates says [...] that only 'wisdom is good and ignorance bad,' he means that only wisdom is always good just because of what it is and only ignorance is always bad just because of what it is" (138).

[152] Both Annas (1993a) and Irwin (1995) make this point.

[153] Vlastos notices these passages (230, n. 99). He argues that, since they refer back to the earlier argument, they must be read the same way. That is, when Socrates says "good" or "neither good nor evil," we are to understand the qualification "just by themselves." Annas responds that this "requires expanding the text in various unobvious ways at several points" (57).

get to be happy. In addition, the *aporia* at which Socrates and Clinias' search ends may also result from, and depend upon, the premise that only wisdom is good.[154]

The Safe Interpretation, therefore, cannot adequately account for the facts of the dialogue. When Socrates says that none of the other things are good or bad, he seems to mean it. The question is, does he have any support for this claim? What is his purpose in making it?

3.2 The Proto-Stoic Interpretation. According to Annas' Proto-Stoic Interpretation, Socrates really does accept the stronger, more radical form of the conclusion. In this, he anticipates the Stoic view that "virtue is the only real good, and that the conventional goods are not really good at all, but should strictly speaking be called neutral, neither good nor bad" (55). Moreover, Annas think that Socrates has some good reasons for this conclusion. She maintains that the stronger claim, C10, "simply follows from the assumption that what is good must benefit, together with the demonstration that the conventional goods do not always benefit, only when correctly used" (55). So, according to her, the earlier argument supports the stronger conclusion, in a way. In schematic form, here's how Annas interprets the argument:

P14. X is good only if x always benefits. (Assumption)
C12. T2 items do not always benefit. (The upshot of the earlier argument (P9-C7))
C10. Therefore, T2 items are not good.

[154] So Annas (1993a), p. 58-61, argues. Basically, the idea is this: The knowledge that Socrates and Clinias are looking for is a knowledge that "combines making and knowing how to use the thing which it makes" (289b). But if wealth and freedom and so on were goods (when used correctly), the statesman's craft could be the one that knows both how to produce and use these things. There would be no *aporia*. The *aporia* arises because Socrates' presumes that wisdom *alone* is good. Thus its only beneficial use is to produce more wisdom, and it is hard to see how wisdom producing wisdom-producing wisdom (like a sort of virus) is a good thing. I address the second protreptic conversation in more detail in § 5 below.

But the assumption upon which this argument is built, P14, gets its apparent plausibility from a sort of modal fallacy.[155] Think of it this way. This premise is plausible:

P14*. Always, if x is good, x benefits.

According to P14*, it is always the case that x is good only when (and insofar as) x benefits. In situations where x fails to benefit, x is not good. But P14 puts the modal quantifier in a different place, making for a less plausible premise. It claims that x is good only if x *cannot fail* to benefit. This seems wrong. For example, medical nitroglycerin is not *always* good. It harms healthy people who take it. But when I have a certain kind of heart condition, nitroglycerin is very good, indeed invaluable. Thus, the circumstances make a big difference.

Annas is right that Plato sometimes reasons this way. Plato often seems to say that if x is F essentially, by nature, or in itself, it cannot fail to be F. For example, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates claims that since fire is *essentially* hot, it cannot fail to be hot or in any way admit its opposite, cold (103b-106d). This *is* Socrates' point in C9—*in themselves*, T2 items are neither good nor bad. But that does *not* mean that they cannot *become* good when accompanied by wisdom (as a person becomes tall by the presence of the Tall, or beautiful by the presence of Beauty). So Annas still has not shown how Socrates can support C10, at least without further argument. We'd need to know more about happiness, wisdom, and other goods before we could decide whether to accept C10.

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[155] Socrates employs a similar move in the final argument of the *Phaedo* that the soul survives death. The essence of a soul is that it makes things alive (105c). But then, Socrates concludes, the soul will not admit life's opposite, death (105d). Thus, the soul is deathless, and therefore indestructible (105e-106e). The crucial premise, implicitly, is this: If x is a soul, x is necessarily alive. That is why the soul supposedly cannot die. But the correct conclusion from the fact that a soul's essence to bring life is the following: Necessarily, if x is a soul, x is alive. But x could still cease to be alive, and, thereby, to exist as a soul. This argument commits the same modal fallacy.

3.3 The Reconstructivist Interpretation. The strength of Irwin's interpretation and others like it is that it recognizes the limitations of Socrates' argument in the text. Irwin shows that the argument, as it stands, does not provide adequate support for its strong conclusion.[156] So he attempts to reconstruct a theory of happiness on which this claim, and similar ones that Plato makes in other dialogues, would make sense. He argues that Socrates has what he calls an "adaptive conception of happiness." That is, according to Irwin, Socrates conceives of happiness as the complete fulfillment of desires, and he adopts an adaptive strategy for achieving fulfillment. Whenever he discovers he has an unsatisfiable desire, he gives it up. By adapting his desires to circumstances in this way, Irwin explains, Socrates' desires are never unfulfilled, and he is always happy. This theory of happiness explains Socrates' otherwise inexplicable assertions that fortune does not affect the happiness of the wise person (at 280a-b) and that things like health are not good (C10) (see esp. Irwin 202-9). If Irwin is right, Socrates implicitly reasons as follows:

P15. If S is wise, S will adapt his desires to whatever is available to S so that all of S's desires are fulfilled. (The adaptive strategy)
P16. If all of S's desires are fulfilled, S is happy. (The desire fulfillment theory of happiness)
C13. If S is wise, S is happy. (The thesis of the sufficiency of wisdom (or virtue) for happiness.) (From P15 and P16)
C14. Items other than wisdom (T2 items) are not good (< C10). (Corollary of C13: Since a wise person is happy no matter what else he has, other things are not good, insofar as they do not contribute to happiness (Irwin 204).)

According to Irwin, when Socrates says, in C8, that T2 items are sometimes "greater goods," he may not mean to say that they actually *are* goods, only that they are *closer* to

[156] After presenting criticisms of the argument similar to my own, Irwin says, "After finding such serious flaws in this argument [...] we might remind ourselves that the dialogue as a whole is concerned with eristic, and suggest that even the protreptic passages are not free of the fallacious argument that is rife in the rest of the dialogue" (204).

being goods than their opposites (204). Actually, on this interpretation, a wise person does not need them at all, because he can be happy with whatever situation he finds himself in.

Irwin's interpretation explains why Socrates would believe that T2 items are not goods. But, as Irwin himself recognizes, neither the *Euthydemus* nor any other dialogue provides *direct* evidence that Socrates or Plato actually thinks this. Irwin is constructing a theory and attributing it to Socrates, as the best explanation for his claims. But we might wonder whether *this* is really the theory Socrates has in mind, or, indeed, whether he (or Plato) has a theory in mind at all. I argue that there is reason to think he does not. There is a better explanation.

4. Reasons to be cautious

4.1 So far, I've criticized interpretations that seek to resolve the apparent contradiction between C8-C9 and C10-C11 and that claim, thereby, to discover Socrates' or Plato's theory of happiness and value. Now, each of the interpretations could respond to my criticisms, at greater or lesser interpretive cost. (Indeed, this very fact seems to confirm that the textual evidence is indeterminate.[157]) But there are also positive reasons to think that Plato does not *intend* to endorse Socrates' stronger claims as his own position.

The interpretive problem here is, as I mentioned before, parallel to the problem posed by Socrates' argument about *eutuchia*. Socrates' argument is insufficient to support his strong conclusion. What do we do? Should we reinterpret the conclusion so that it fits

[157] One could appeal to evidence from other dialogues in order to support one interpretation over another (as many commentators, including the ones I've discussed, do). But it is notoriously difficult to know which other dialogues are relevant. This problem is compounded in the case of the *Euthydemus*, which is particularly difficult to place in the chronology of the dialogues. Moreover, these issues are just as difficult to interpret in other dialogues.

the argument? Or do we reconstruct a theory or argument so that the strong conclusion comes out correct?

4.2 Dramatic clues. Socrates' attitude in the dialogue toward his arguments here is decidedly cautious. At the beginning, he wants the sophist brothers, who claim to be skilled professionals in teaching virtue (273d), to make the demonstration. He takes it up himself only because they do not take it seriously, but when he does, he repeatedly describes his efforts as "unprofessional [*idiotikôs*] and ridiculous" and "improvising" (278d5-7; *"idiotikon"* again at 282d6). He emphasizes that he is working in an area where he does not know all that he needs to know. The aporetic end of the dialogue, where Socrates and Clinias fail to discover what sort of knowledge they need, reinforces how little Socrates thinks he knows.

Despite his lack of knowledge, however, Socrates gives it a try. What's interesting is that his core argument (up to C5) is pretty good.[158] (Just as, in a similar way, there is an interesting core idea contained in the *eutuchia* argument.) And, as I said earlier, the argument up to C5 accomplishes Socrates' protreptic purpose. It shows Clinias (and us) that wisdom has a unique value, that the mere acquisition of wealth, honor, and power

[158] That's not to say it escapes objections. I see two: First, there is Bobonich's objection, that this scheme leaves out goods that either need not be used to be good or that are not the sort of things that can be used. Be that as it may, the T2 items are not of that sort. Moreover, to be fair, throughout the argument Socrates talks only of "possessions" and "the things we called good in the beginning." In this informal setting, Plato seems to be open to there being other goods not on the list, which, perhaps, are not possessions (like pleasure and the good of others). Bobonich seems to be asking too much from this argument. The second objection targets Socrates' claim (in C2) that *only* wisdom provides correct usage. As we know from the *Meno*, true beliefs also produce correct action (98b-c). Although this is true, Plato nevertheless believes that only wisdom *reliably* provides correct usage (cf. the second argument regarding good fortune, *eutuchia*). Mere true belief is not reliable, because it cannot adapt to new circumstances.

won't bring happiness. Their value is conditioned upon our being wise enough to use them correctly.

Moreover, there is evidence that this core argument is what Socrates and Plato want to make sure that their respective audiences take away from the discussion. At the end of the discussion, it is *this* core argument that Socrates summarizes:

> Since we all wish [*prothumoumetha*] to be happy, and since we appear to become so by using things and using them rightly [*orthôs*], and since knowledge [*epistêmê*] was the source of rightness and good fortune, it seems to be necessary that every man should prepare himself by every means to become as wise as possible. (282a)

As Socrates' conclusions become stronger, however, the arguments for them become weaker and less convincing. In fact, as I've noted, the strongest conclusions (C8-C11) are hardly defended at all.[159] The interpreter has to supply arguments or infer them from other things that Socrates says. It is as if Socrates were in a hurry to make his point. But it is the stronger conclusions that create the problems later in the dialogue, not the core argument. All of these dramatic cues seem to indicate that we should accept the core argument but be cautious about the stronger conclusions, which, though perhaps true, nevertheless are not well supported and contribute to the serious impasse of the dialogue.

4.3 Philosophical reasons. We also have philosophical reasons not to think that the stronger conclusions, such as C10-C11, represent Plato's considered position. That is because many important philosophical questions still remain unanswered, questions that Plato would need to address before he could develop a position on these issues.

[159] I am not sure about C7. I think that the argument for C7 is pretty good, but C7 is a bold claim, more than Socrates needs to convince Clinias of the value of wisdom. (It is also a little alarmist: Don't do *anything* that you do not understand, or you'll make mistakes and make yourself miserable!) Perhaps C7 plays a role in scaring Clinias away from pursuits besides philosophy, as it were.

First, as Socrates points out, they still don't know what knowledge one needs to be happy (282e).[160] And in the second protreptic conversation, when Socrates and Clinias try to discover what it is, they fail. But as I argued above (§ 1.6), this is a crucial question.

This first problem is connected to a second: Socrates and Clinias have not discovered what precisely happiness is. We know (from P7 and C5) that a person is happy only if he uses things correctly, in a kind of activity or active life.[161] But correctly for what? Of what kind of activity does the happy life consist? The answers that we give to these questions are crucial to answering questions about the relative importance of luck, wisdom, and other goods. For example, if happiness were the activity of driving on the NASCAR circuit, it would require a lot of good luck. You *would* need external resources (quite a lot of them) to be able to engage in it and be happy. On the other hand, if happiness were merely acting correctly with whatever resources you happen to have, it would require little or no luck, and wisdom would be sufficient. Socrates makes suggestions about what he thinks happiness is. His assertions *suggest* that wisdom is sufficient for happiness. But he neither provides solid arguments for this view nor addresses the question directly.

Finally, Socrates has not, at least in this dialogue, addressed the question of the relation between wisdom and virtue. Most commentators assume that when Socrates talks about wisdom here, he means *virtue* or *moral wisdom.* But in fact, Socrates is pretty vague about the kind of wisdom that is necessary for happiness. Far from identifying that wisdom

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[160] The fact that Socrates uses so many words for wisdom indicates that he does not yet know what kind of wisdom it is or which term fits it most precisely.

[161] Brickhouse and Smith (2000) and Dimas (2002) argue that happiness *is* an activity for Plato. I am inclined to agree, but the text is not determinate. Socrates says only that T2 items possessed by S are of advantage to S only if S uses them (C3). He could mean that happiness is activity, a using of items. Or he could mean that the items *produce* happiness for us when we use them (where the happiness produced is distinct from the activity of using). Irwin (1995) and Roshotko argue for this interpretation. I see nothing in the text that decides this question either way. In any event, my comments apply to either interpretation, *mutatis mutandis*.

with virtue, Socrates explicitly *distinguishes* wisdom from the other virtues at 279a-c. Then, later in the argument, he lumps self-control (*sophrosunê*) and courage together with wealth and good looks and the other things that are worse for a person without wisdom (see esp. P6, 281c-d).[162] Then, later, when Socrates and Clinias investigate what kind of wisdom they need to become happy, they consider things like gold-prospecting, speech-writing, and generalship. Clearly, they haven't already decided that the knowledge they need is virtue, or they wouldn't consider these things. An interpreter could point to arguments in other dialogues, but Clinias doesn't know these arguments. We are trying to understand the place of this argument in the *dialogue* (and not as an isolated fragment of a treatise), so we must be mindful of the dramatic context, including what *Clinias* knows.

In his work, one of the things that Plato consistently emphasizes is the need for philosophical questions to be addressed in the proper order. So, for example, before we can determine whether an action is pious, we must know what piety is (*Euthyphro* 4e). Before we investigate whether virtue is teachable, we need to determine what virtue is (*Meno* 71b). Before we can decide whether injustice is more profitable than justice, we first need to inquire what justice is (*Rep.* I.354b). If Plato meant to assert C10-C11 *as his position*, if he were *claiming* that wisdom or virtue is sufficient (or not sufficient!) for happiness before investigating what happiness, wisdom, and virtue *are*, he would be guilty of taking things out of their proper order. For these reasons, I think there must be another explanation for why Plato has Socrates assert these conclusions.

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[162] Commentators on this passage often scramble in their footnotes, pointing out how Socrates argues elsewhere that virtue is essentially wisdom, and supposing that when Socrates makes his arguments about courage and self-control, he means *conventional*, not *true* courage and self-control. That may be true, but it obscures what Socrates is doing in *this* dialogue. Our ignorance about what we need for happiness is the point of the argument.

4.4 The protreptic purpose of the discussion. When Socrates begins this conversation, he describes it as a demonstration of "the protreptic skill [*protreptikê sophia*]" (278c-d). Accordingly, Socrates' efforts display a definite strategy. Since he wants to change Clinias' motivations, Socrates begins by throwing out some motivational hooks. The biggest motivation of all—in fact, for Plato and other eudaimonists, the motivation upon which all other motivations depend[163]—is doing well (*eu prattein*) or being happy (*eudaimonein*). Everyone, including Clinias, wants to be happy. But how is it done?

Clinias already has some vague beliefs about how to become happy and what happiness involves, which Socrates makes explicit in T1, T2, and T3. Clinias is a noble youth living in Athens, and he wants things like wealth, beauty, and honor. Socrates piques the young man's interest by starting with things by which he is already motivated, and with beliefs about happiness that he already holds in some vague form. T3, the common sense belief that good fortune is the greatest of goods, is another of this sort. Clinias may not have thought too much about good fortune. But, living in his culture, listening to its stories, and watching the behavior of others, he has unconsciously taken on T3's picture of the world and shaped his life in accordance with it.

Socrates' argument against T3 is fallacious, but it challenges this picture. At least, in pointing out that the *skilled* craftsmen succeed most often, Socrates casts doubt on T3.[164]

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[163] Irwin (1995) defines eudaimonism in terms of three claims: "(1) In all our rational actions we pursue our own happiness. (2) We pursue happiness only for its own sake, never for the sake of anything else. (3) Whatever else we rationally pursue, we pursue it for the sake of happiness" (53).

[164] It sounds like a cliché to us to say, "Stay in school, or you will not succeed." But it may not have been obvious to the Greeks (especially noble Greeks). I think many of them believed that it was either *eutuchia* in birth (family nobility, wealth, native talents) or later in life (projects turning out well) that made people succeed or fail. (By *eutuchia*, I mean either luck as in random chance or favor of the gods.) See, for

Even if he cannot show that wisdom *guarantees* success and luck without begging important questions, he nevertheless challenges Clinias (and Plato his readers) to rethink the relation between wisdom and success.

The same goes for the set of progressively stronger theses that Socrates advances against T1 and T2. He does not want only to show that T1 and T2 are wrong. He wants decisively to *challenge* Clinias, to give him a paradox he can't help but think about. Plato's intentions with his audience are the same. As the scholarly attention that this passage has received demonstrates, Socrates' strong claims, on a topic so important for our living good lives, challenge us to try to decide whether, and how, they might be true. If this is the effect that Plato is going for, he need not be himself philosophically committed to their truth.

4.5 Of course, if my interpretation is right, it creates a problem. Socrates is trying to convince Clinias to pursue philosophy. But according to my interpretation, he's using bad, fallacious arguments to do it, and, what's more, he knows what he's doing. Clinias doesn't seem to notice what is going on. Is Clinias therefore being bamboozled into the love of wisdom? How good a start is Socrates giving Clinias in philosophy if he introduces the boy to it by means of bad arguments?

The problem of how to account for Socrates' use of fallacious or incomplete arguments is endemic in the study of Plato's early dialogues, because they're everywhere. In particular, (as we'll see in the chapters to follow) they seem to proliferate in protreptic

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example, Alcibiades' response to Socrates' claims that he needs to take *epimeleia* for himself in the *Alcibiades* I. Alcibiades believes that his talents and charisma will make him politically successful, and he initially scorns Socrates' offer of help. Noble Greeks tended to prefer inborn gifts to gains achieved through *ascholia* (being busy, having no leisure).

passages. It seems that whenever Socrates sets out to convince someone to tend to his soul and practice philosophy, he uses his most tricky and subtle fallacies. What's going on?

I have seen three responses to this problem. The first simply denies that Plato recognized the fallacies.[165] Plato wrote his dialogues as the discipline of logic was emerging, and therefore he did not realize that Socrates' arguments were fallacious. While this response may be adequate for some fallacious argument forms,[166] it seems implausible that Plato did not understand such basic fallacies such as the fallacy of equivocation (such as his equivocation on *eutuchia* in the first argument against T3). On the contrary, Plato seems quite aware of several fallacious argument forms (particularly in the *Euthydemus*), and he sometimes *uses* these fallacies quite consciously to make points.[167]

The second response admits that Socrates consciously uses fallacious arguments, but claims that Socrates' good ends justify his means. Weiss (2000) advances this position. According to Weiss, Socrates and the sophist brothers in the *Euthydemus* are alike in using fallacious arguments. But Socrates uses them only against views that he believes false (i.e., only for good), whereas the brothers refute any view advanced. On this interpretation, Socrates' goals of showing people their ignorance and getting them to care about virtue are so important that he will employ any means necessary to achieve his psychological ends.

I am not convinced by this solution, either. The chief problem is this: If Socrates is engaged in this kind of psychological manipulation, he risks turning his young targets into

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[165] Sprague (1962) cites E. R. Dodds in his 1959 commentary on the *Gorgias*: "We must remember," writes Dodds, "that when the *Gorgias* was written the study of logic was in its earliest infancy (as Aristotle's *Sophistici Elenchi* sufficiently shows)" (Dodds, 249).

[166] For example, I would not be surprised if Plato was unaware of the modal fallacy that I attributed to Annas' reconstruction of his argument and to his explicit argument in the *Phaedo*. See above, § 4.2.

[167] For example, Socrates recognizes that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are equivocating on the term "teaching" when they refute Clinias. Sprague (1962) discusses in detail Plato's use and awareness of fallacy in the *Euthydemus*.

either misologues or eristics.[168] If they should discover the faults in Socrates' arguments (which they well might), they would realize that they had been manipulated. They would then come either to distrust argument or to use it as weapon against others.

My response to the problem, therefore, is slightly different. I contend that Socrates' arguments are fallacious only because they are incomplete. That is, I agree with Weiss that Socrates (in some sense) believes the conclusions for which he argues (or, at least, believes that the positions that he refutes are false). But I maintain that Socrates also thinks that, with more work, the gaps and fallacious moves in his arguments might be filled, or perhaps replaced with different, better arguments that investigate the key issues (such as, in this case, happiness) more precisely.[169] As an illustration of the sort of thing I have in mind, think of the relationship between *Republic* I and the rest of the *Republic*. In *Rep.* I, Socrates contends, against Thrasymachus, that a just person is happy, and an unjust one wretched (354a). The main argument appeals to the function of the soul, arguing that the soul functions and thus lives well when it exhibits its proper virtue, which is justice (352d-4a). But this argument and the others in *Rep.* I have gaps and questionable moves, and finally even Socrates is dissatisfied: He says he's been like a "glutton" and hasn't

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[168] See Socrates' account of "misologues"—argument haters—in the *Phaedo* 89c-91a. A misologue is analogous to a misanthrope—having encountered many bad arguments, he acquires a dislike for arguments and comes to believe that "there is no soundness or reliability in any object or in any argument" (90c).

[169] Socrates sometimes mentions that the argument that he is producing on the occasion is less rigorous or precise than it might be, and that there is a longer road by which the conclusion might be established more firmly or the question might be better investigated. For example, in the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates argues that the self is the soul, but he has reservations about the proof he's given: "If we've proven it well enough, but not precisely [*akribôs*], that suffices for us. The proof will be precise, when we find what we just now left out, because it required much investigation"—namely, an investigation into the "self itself [*auto to auto*]" (129b, 130c-d, my translation). The proof they've given is good enough for now, Socrates says, though not as good as it might be. Similarly, in *Republic* 4, when Socrates and Glaucon are investigating the nature of the soul, Socrates says, "You should know, Glaucon, that, in my opinion, we will never get a precise answer using our present methods of argument—although there is another longer and fuller road that does lead to such an answer. But perhaps we can get an answer that's up to the standard of our previous statements and inquiries" (4.435c-d). See also, perhaps, *Phaedo* 99d ff.

investigated the question in the right way (354b-c). In the rest of the *Republic*, however, he does not repudiate the conclusions he had reached. Rather, it's striking that many of the apparently questionable claims in *Rep.* I are given further support and elucidation in the rest of the dialogue. Socrates investigates the nature of the soul, discusses the functions of its parts, and shows how virtue is necessary for the soul to be happy and do well. The argument of *Rep.* II-IX thus fills out and revises the sketchy reasoning given in *Rep.* I.[170]

I propose that Socrates' protreptic arguments have a similar function. Socrates knows that his time with youths like Clinias is limited. They are being pulled in many other directions, and so it is crucial that he get their attention while he can.[171] So he produces short, striking, and intriguing arguments, meant to jolt the youths out of their complacency and to get them to pay attention. These arguments are, by necessity, incomplete, since he has neither the time nor the knowledge to develop them more fully and precisely. But, if he's successful, the youths will begin to think about what he says and want to talk about them some more. They begin to *practice* philosophy. And, because Socrates thinks that his conclusions are right, he's pretty sure that, as the youths think about the issues further, they will eventually come to agree with him.[172] They won't become misologues, because they won't discover that Socrates was wrong or deceiving them.

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[170] Of course, despite the advances made, I think Plato would not believe that the answers given by the *Republic* as a whole are the last word, either. See, e.g., *Rep.* 4.435c-d, cited above.

[171] At 275b, Socrates tells Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, "He [Clinias] is young, and we are anxious about him [...] for fear that somebody might get in ahead of us and turn his mind to some other interest and ruin him." See also *Rep.* VI, where Socrates explains why philosophically talented youths do not reach their potential in ordinary cities. They are corrupted by others who want to use their talents for their own purposes.

[172] I have had the experience that I am describing whenever I have taken a class from a particularly good professor. At first, when the professor says something, the student basically takes what he says on faith. The professor can outline considerations in favor of what he is saying, but he cannot, in the span of a class hour, fully explain or defend what he is saying, even if the student could understand. But when the student looks into the matter on his own later, he discovers that, despite what he may initially have thought, the professor

To put it another way: Socrates' strong claims not only challenge Clinias (and by extension, the readers), but also lay out a sort of agenda for further philosophical investigation. In a way, they are like a *research proposal*.[173] Plato believes and wants to defend the view that wisdom is sufficient for happiness. But he does not quite know how to support this conclusion. So in this passage, he sets out the beginnings of an argument (the core argument) and finishes with more controversial claims that get the ball rolling. He knows that people like us will read the dialogue and be inspired to investigate the question, to see if he's right. And in the subsequent history of Greek philosophy, something like this actually happened. Not all who read it were convinced by its conclusions; they saw the importance of the questions but disagreed with Socrates' answers to them.[174] But others found a deeper truth in the argument and tried to fill its gaps.[175] The important thing about these arguments is that they pose a philosophical challenge. Socrates is challenging Clinias, and Plato, by means of the dialogue, is challenging his readers. Even if we do not agree with Socrates, we begin to think about these issues for ourselves. We begin to *do* philosophy, as Plato wants.[176]

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was right. He discovers more and more evidence that confirms and provides further depth to the view which he at first took only on the professor's authority. I think that Plato recognizes this phenomenon, which is one reason that he has Socrates consistently deny that he is a teacher. The real learning, the real gain in understanding, has to come as a result of the *student's* efforts, when he discovers the deeper truth of what he has been told (cf. *Meno* 85c-d).

[173] I am using the term "research proposal" a bit loosely here. There are, of course, different sorts of things that we might call "research proposals." Some may merely propose propositions or ideas to be investigated and perhaps proved; others may already have worked out some or much of the proof. It seems to me that there would be a continuum between the barest hunches or intuitions with which philosophical thought begins and the complete theoretical understanding at which (at least some) philosophers aim. I've experienced this continuum in my own work: I began with a vague idea of what I thought Plato was doing, and as I worked through the problem, my idea and my understanding of the topic expanded. But even when the idea is well along the way, there remains much more to be done.

[174] Perhaps Aristotle felt this way. See my footnote above.

[175] Like the Stoics (according to Long) and Plato himself, later in his career (according to Bobonich).

[176] Gordon (1999) is an interesting study of the way that Plato's dialogues are constructed such that they are "capable of compelling the turn toward philosophy" in their readers (2). One way that Gordon approaches

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that there is a big difference between a philosopher's hunches, hypotheses, or research proposals, and the settled positions that he puts forward as part of a worked-out philosophical theory. Hunches and hypotheses are important, because they guide and motivate philosophical thought. But no philosopher wants his *hunches* to be attributed to him in the same way that his well-defended and worked-out views are. All too often, readers of this argument in the *Euthydemus* have supposed that Socrates is expressing Plato's *positions*, but, if I am right, he is really putting forward only research proposals.

5. The second protreptic dialogue

5.1 We might think that, after the first protreptic conversation, Socrates' work would be done. After all, Socrates has undermined Clinias' previous beliefs and convinced the boy that he needs to love and pursue wisdom. Clinias has expressed his intention to seek wisdom by any means necessary (282d). What more needs to be done to turn Clinias toward the philosophical life? At it turns out, Socrates does not think that the work of transforming Clinias' life and putting him on the right path is done. He thinks there are further steps, and he asks Euthydemus and Dionysodorus to continue the demonstration: "Start where I left off and show the boy whether he ought to acquire every sort of knowledge, or whether there is one sort that he ought to get in order to be a happy man and a good one, and what it is" (282d8-e4).

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this issue is through reader response theory. She argues that "a literary text requires the participation of the subject inside of the object to constitute the aesthetic experience" (45). According to Gordon, texts, including Plato's dialogues, have certain indeterminate elements, and these compel the reader to construct and synthesize meaning from the text. Thus Plato's dialogues work on us in ways that parallel Socrates' efforts with his interlocutors. We are forced to examine ourselves, and we begin to do philosophy as we struggle to make sense of the text (51-2). Gordon thus develops some of the theoretical framework for what I am saying here.

Here, again, we see how little has actually been accomplished by the first protreptic dialogue, and how much more remains. So far, the boy has agreed only that he will love wisdom and do anything to get it. He believes Socrates' arguments about its supreme importance. I see no reason to doubt his seriousness. But even if he is committed now, what is he supposed to do? He does not know what wisdom to seek. For all we know so far, it could be the wisdom of how to drive a race car, or how to find gold (see 288e). It could be the "wisdom" that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus teach. Moreover, neither Clinias nor the readers so far know *how* to pursue wisdom or what the love of wisdom (philosophy) involves. Clinias' single verbal commitment, elicited by persuasive argument, hardly constitutes a comprehensive change in his way of life and his commitments. The lesson needs to be built upon, reinforced, and given direction. In short, Socrates needs actually to engage Clinias in the philosophical search.

This is what we see Socrates doing in the second protreptic passage. In the previous chapter, I argued that Socrates aims not only to show his fellow-citizens that they do not have the wisdom they need to be happy, but also to get them to start taking active steps to attain that wisdom. Philosophical activity is what gets us closer to wisdom. In this passage, Socrates begins to make Clinias a partner in his philosophical quest.

5.2 Socrates and Clinias begin where they left off in the previous argument. They had agreed that it is necessary to love wisdom. But the love of wisdom (*philosophia*), Socrates says, is the acquisition (*ktêsis*) of knowledge (288d8).[177] So what kind of knowledge should

[177] As I mentioned above (§ 2.1, fn. 29), *ktêsis* can refer either to a process (*acquiring* wisdom) or the result (the *possession* of wisdom). In this passage, it clearly refers to the process. In his next question, he uses the

we acquire? Obviously, the knowledge necessary for happiness would be the knowledge that benefits us (288e1-2).

P17. The knowledge necessary for happiness is the one that benefits us. [More precisely: The knowledge that S needs to be happy is the one that benefits S when S possesses it.] (See P7, P8, and C5)

But not every sort of knowledge benefits its possessor. Many kinds of knowledge are only knowledge of how to produce things, not of how to use them. Socrates mentions several examples: gold-digging, money-making, even the knowledge of how to make people immortal. As Socrates puts it, "There does not seem to be any benefit [*ophelos*] in any other sort of knowledge which knows how to make things [...] unless it knows how to use what it makes" (289a4-7).

C15. Knowledge K benefits its possessor, S, only if K knows how to use what it makes. (cf. C4)

This condition also rules out crafts like lyre-making and *aulos*-making, since, in these cases, the skill of using the product is distinct from the craft that makes it (289c).[178]

During this second discussion, something very interesting happens to the dynamic between Socrates and Clinias. Throughout the first discussion, Clinias is passive. He does not offer his own thoughts; on the contrary, Socrates leads him to what seems to be a predetermined result. The first part of the second discussion, up to 289c, follows a similar pattern. But an important turning point occurs at 289c6, when Socrates asks, "But, by the

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verbal form of the word in the aorist, not the perfective: "What sort of knowledge would we acquire [*ktêsamenoi*] if we went about it in the right way [*orthôs ktêsaimetha*]?" (288d9-e1).

[178] The condition set by C15 seems too strong. Why does the craft need to know both how to make and how to use what it makes? Why can it not, like *aulos*-playing, know only how to use things that are made by other crafts? Socrates seems to want a kind of knowledge that is self-sufficient and does not have to depend upon another craft or knowledge for that materials that it uses. For example, if *aulos*-playing were the knowledge that we need to live well, we would need *auloi* to play. For self-sufficiency as a condition on happiness in Greek ethics, see Annas (1993b), 40-42. If this is what Socrates' is thinking, it requires more argument than he gives it. As I mentioned before, whether or not external goods are necessary for a happy life is something that remains to be determined.

gods [*pros theôn*], [...] if we should learn the speechwriting craft, is this what we would have to possess to be happy?" (289c6-8). This is a very different sort of question (as indicated by the oath at its beginning). Socrates is not asking Clinias merely to agree to what he says. He's asking him to deal, on his own, with a new case.

Clinias takes up the challenge. He tells Socrates that speechwriting isn't the craft they need either, and he gives some good reasons why not, appealing to Socrates' lyre-maker example. Speechwriters, he says, know how to compose speeches, but they have no idea of how to use them. As in the case of lyre-making, the art that makes and the art that uses are distinct (289d). Socrates next suggests that generalship might be the art they are looking for, and this time Clinias advances still further, providing his own intelligent reasons against the suggestion. Generalship, he explains, is a kind of hunting, and every hunter must hand what he catches over to someone else to use. Generals hand what they capture over to statesmen to use (290b-c).

Now, it seems, the roles of teacher and pupil have been reversed. Clinias is explaining things to Socrates. The reversal is so startling, in fact, that Crito, to whom the story is being told, does not believe that it happened. He thinks that "some superior being" must have been speaking (291a). He thinks that Socrates actually made the comments about generalship, and that Socrates mixed up the story.[179]

What is the significance of this passage? After all, it is odd that Socrates would have gotten the story mixed up, when he had done so well retelling it to that point. I can't

[179] Crito and Socrates rule out Clinias, Ctesippus, Euthydemus, and Dionysodorus, so Socrates is the only participant left who could have said it. And Crito is likely to believe that Socrates is a "superior being," even if Socrates does not believe himself to be such. Also, as some commentators point out, the claims in question (in particular, about geometers, astronomers, and calculators handing their discoveries over to dialecticians) look forward to Plato's later work, especially in the *Republic*. See, for example, Kahn (2000). So there is some reason to think that Crito is right.

think of another case where Socrates makes mistakes when recounting his conversations. So what is *Plato's* purpose in including the incident? I think that he is calling particular attention to Socrates' technique in dealing Clinias.[180] Socrates is intentionally engaging Clinias in doing philosophy, and he is doing it the way a good philosophy teacher must. As any good philosophy teacher knows, the best way to teach students to do philosophy is to get them to think about philosophical problems for themselves. But the teacher can't throw them into difficult problems straight off, because they won't know what to do. She must start by showing them some philosophical tools and strategies. Then she needs to give them problems particularly suited to the tools they've been given. That is exactly what Socrates does with Clinias. First, using the examples of the skills of acquiring gold and making lyres, he shows Clinias how to think about skills and how to classify them. Then he gives Clinias examples—speechwriting, generalship—to which the boy can apply the tools he's been given.

In the best case, the teacher will experience what Socrates imagines happening. The student begins to practice philosophy on his own, not just following the steps laid out by the teacher, but going beyond them. The teacher puts the *student* in the position to say the wise things. This is a very different model from some other kinds of teaching. Perhaps the story that Socrates tells Crito about Clinias is unbelievable. Clinias does appear to be

[180] Kahn says about this, "Thus the text explicitly marks as a mystery this strange anticipation of the relationship between mathematics and dialectic that will be elucidated in *Republic* VII" (92). Parry (2003), on the other hand, does not seem to notice that *Clinias* was speaking: "Socrates argues that [speech-making and generalship] each turns over what it produces to another craft to be used" (16). Gill (2000) is better: the point of the passage, he says, is "that it does not matter precisely who articulates what is learnt. What matter is that the argument works through a 'shared search' or collaborative learning" (140). I agree generally, but I do think it is important that Plato depicts *Clinias* making important points in the argument. Often, Socrates' 'shared searches' are shared only in the weak sense that the interlocutor follows along as Socrates searches (see, e.g., the search for the *philos* in the *Lysis*, next chapter). It is thus significant here that Clinias seems actually to have *learned* something.

learning incredibly fast. Nevertheless, if I am right, Plato is making an important point to his readers about the process of learning to think (and ultimately, to live) philosophically.

By the time of Crito's interjection, the dynamic between Clinias and Socrates has changed. Before, Socrates was doing philosophy, and Clinias was watching, following along. Now, Socrates and Clinias are doing philosophy together. In a way, then, it does not matter, from Socrates' point of view, who says what. They are working together on the problem. Socrates' subsequent description of the conversation bears this out. He does not say that "Clinias said this" and "I said that." Rather, he says, "we got to the kingly art and were giving it a thorough inspection" (291b4-5); "we said to each other" (291e1-2); "Clinias and I agreed" (292b1-2); and "we are in just as great difficulties as ever" (292e4).[181] By Socrates' account, they are equals in the discussion, and he does not need to distinguish what Clinias says from what he says.

5.3 Socrates and Clinias' attempt to identify the knowledge that we need to become happy, however, ends in failure, in *aporia* (as Crito says at 292e6-7). Socrates says that, after some discussion, he and Clinias concluded that the statesman's craft (*politikê technê*), which is the same as the kingly craft (*basilikê technê*), might be what they are looking for (291b-c).[182] Socrates explains, "It was to this craft that generalship and the others handed over the management of the products of which they themselves were the craftsmen, as if

[181] Crito uses the second person plural: "You [plural] seemed to have got yourselves into quite a puzzle [*pollên ge aporian*]" (292e6-7). Socrates and Clinias together got themselves into the *aporia*, Crito says, not Socrates alone.

[182] Several commentators, including Annas and Parry, have noted a puzzling shift here. Before, Socrates had been talking about what makes us happy as individuals. But now he introduces and focuses on *politikê technê*, the cause of right action in a *city*. Both Annas and Parry speculate that Plato may have in mind the *Republic* (or the ideas defended therein), where he develops the idea that individual virtue can develop only in the context of the ideal state (see Annas (1993a) 61-2, Parry 16, 26).

this craft alone knew how to use them" (291c7-9). This craft, he says, is the cause of right action in the city and makes all things useful. But they eventually prove to be unable to give an account of how the statesman's craft meets the criteria set out earlier for the craft that they are looking for.

The discussion goes like this: The kingly craft seems to be what they are looking for. But, like all crafts, it must produce something; it must have an *ergon* (291d-e). Medicine and farming each have an *ergon*; so also must the craft in question (291e-2a). What is it? At the least, its *ergon* must be something useful and good, or otherwise it would not the craft they are looking for (292a). But, Socrates says, "Clinias and I of course agreed that nothing is good except some sort of knowledge" (292b1-2). So the usual goods that we think the *politikê technê* produces—like wealth, freedom, and the absence of dissention—turn out to be "neither good nor evil" (292b). It seems the only way that the *politikê technê* can benefit people is by providing them with knowledge. In particular, "it must convey a knowledge which is none other than itself," since no other knowledge is good (292d3-4).

The knowledge that we need to be happy, then, appears to be the knowledge "by which we shall make others good" (292d). We make them good by making them knowledgeable. But there is a problem, Socrates says, in saying *how* making people knowledgeable makes them good and useful. We can only give the same answer again: They are useful because they make still others knowledgeable. But the same question arises again. As Socrates puts it, "In what conceivable way they are good is in no way apparent to us" (292e1). Socrates concludes that they still don't know "what that knowledge is which will make us happy" (292e4-5).

This is a difficult passage to understand, because Socrates is not very specific about what the problem is. What does he mean when he says that it is not apparent in what way they are good? How is the problem generated? And are there any clues about how it might be avoided?

It seems to me that the problem is this: If all that we can say about the knowledge in question is that its function is to produce itself in others, we do not have sufficient information about it to say how having it makes a person *good* or how it is good for him. The ability to self-replicate is not, by itself, a good thing. Consider, for example, a virus. The *ergon* of a virus is to reproduce itself, to make it so that others have the virus. Then, when it succeeds, the produced virus's *ergon* is to pass itself on to still others. The story that Socrates is telling about the *politikê technê* is structurally the same. He stipulates that having this knowledge is good and that those who have it are good and useful. But we do not know *why* they are good, why it is good that people have this knowledge and pass it on to others. As Socrates puts it, it is "in no way apparent" in what way they are good and useful for having it.[183]

What is needed, then, is a fuller account of the good.[184] If some sort of knowledge is good, in what way is it good that a person have it? How does this knowledge relate to

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[183] I owe a lot of my understanding of this passage to Parry, though my account is a little bit different than his. For a completely different interpretation of the *aporia* and its significance, see Gonzalez (2002). According to Gonzalez, the political art is dialectic. Dialectic has no product other than itself—the result of Socrates' dialectic in the *Euthydemus*, Gonzalez explains, is to make Clinias dialectical (177)—but nevertheless our greatest good is to practice it (180). I addressed this interpretation briefly in Chapter 1. The problem is, once again, that it is not clear how practicing dialectic is *good* for the person who does it. Does it exercise his capacities or fulfill his nature? We don't know, and we won't know unless we investigate.

[184] According to Annas, the *aporia* results from the combination of two theses that Socrates espoused in his first discussion with Clinias: First, that virtue is a skill; and, second, that virtue is the only good. She explains:

> If virtue is a skill, then we value it for what it produces; but this is to value it for the wrong reason, since its products are not good, and so do not benefit us. If we value it for the right

happiness or living well? How does the idea, from earlier in the dialogue, of wisdom guiding the use of other items fit in? This is a tangled mess of questions, and Socrates and Clinias do not have answers to them.

6. Conclusion

In the context of the *Euthydemus* and Socrates' protreptic efforts with Clinias, therefore, the *aporia* serves an important function. It demonstrates the difficulty inherent in identifying and obtaining the wisdom that we need, and it also balances the optimism that we might be tempted to read into Socrates' conclusions in the first discussion. By the end, serious questions about wisdom, happiness, and the good remain to be answered. But Socrates had just shown Clinias that wisdom is necessary for happiness and how disastrous consequences follow for those who act in ignorance. According to P9, it is better not to act than to act in ignorance. But now we find that we are so ignorant that we do not know even what sort of knowledge we need. So what are we supposed to do?

The solution, according to Socrates, is to practice philosophy and to try to understand these issues more clearly. To do that *is* to take *epimeleia* for virtue and the state of your soul. We can thus see the general pattern that I laid out in the previous chapter enacted here in the *Euthydemus*. On the one hand, Socrates makes Clinias aware of how deficient the boy is—how ignorant he is about happiness and wisdom, and how he needs wisdom to live well. But, on the other hand, Socrates is careful to show that he

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> reason—it itself is the only good thing—then it seems that we are not really thinking of it as a skill; a skill benefits us, is of use to us, in what it produces. (64)

She thinks that one of these theses must be rejected or modified in order to escape the *aporia*. I do not disagree, in general, with Annas' interpretation. But as I see it, the problem is the same, whichever thesis is rejected. Suppose we keep the thesis that knowledge is the only good (as do the Stoics). Then we need to explain *how* that could be, how happiness is constituted only by being knowledgeable or by wise activity.

himself is not much better off. So, when the *aporia* comes, they meet it together. Socrates helps Clinias to take his life into his own hands by introducing him to philosophy and then making him a fellow-searcher. Thus, in the *Euthydemus*, the solution to the puzzles, the actual content of the knowledge that is being sought, is not as important as the search that has been begun. Socrates and Clinias might not know what wisdom is, nor have a simple formula for being happy, but now they recognize the difficulty and importance of the problem and, for now, are committed to searching for the answers together.

I have argued that attempts to interpret Plato's or Socrates' views about virtue, happiness, and the contribution of other goods based on the *Euthydemus* are mistaken. Socrates is trying to convince Clinias to value wisdom. In pursuit of this goal, his reach clearly exceeds his argumentative grasp. We can try to help Socrates out, to bridge the gaps he leaves. We can speculate about what Plato had in mind that would lead him to believe the things that Socrates says. Better yet, we can do the philosophical work that Plato is asking us to do and think about the questions for ourselves. But we should remember that the argument and the conception of happiness and wisdom that it is developing are unfinished. It is, as Socrates says, an "unprofessional" demonstration, and only the beginning of long, arduous process. But this process, the practice of philosophy, is what he had sought to win Clinias to in the first place. In this, he has succeeded.

Chapter III

How a Lover Should Talk to his Beloved: The Protreptic Elements of the *Lysis*

0. Introduction

Like the *Euthydemus*, the *Lysis* shows Socrates engaged in discussion with promising youths, seeking to draw them into the philosophical life. It is similar to the *Euthydemus* in another way, as well: Socrates uses poorly supported or even fallacious arguments to make his points. In addition, the dialogue's central investigation, in its second half, into *philia*—usually translated 'friendship'—is confusing, abstract, and inconclusive, and scholars have still not come to a consensus about some of the most fundamental questions about it.[185] Because of these things, the *Lysis* has often received bad reviews from commentators. Grote (1888, vol. 2) reports that the dialogue was not well received among nineteenth-century German scholars: "Ast and Socher characterize the dialogue as a tissue of subtle sophistry and eristic contradiction, such as (in their opinion) Plato cannot have composed" (184, fn. 2). And even many of the scholars of the time who

[185] The basic questions on which scholars still disagree include: What is the topic of the investigation? What is the unifying theme of the dialogue, if any? What is the dialogue's purpose? Does the dialogue put forward a theory of *philia*? What is the relation between this dialogue and Plato's other works on love, the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*?

considered the dialogue to be genuine (such as Schleiermacher and Hermann) viewed it as a very early work, marked, as Grote puts it, with the "adolescentiae vestigia" (ibid.).[186]

What might be seen as particularly worrisome about these features of the dialogue, especially from the perspective of my project, is how young and impressionable are Socrates' interlocutors in the dialogue. They are nearly the youngest and most vulnerable characters that Socrates meets in Plato's work.[187] Meletus' charge against Socrates comes to mind: Is Socrates helping or hurting these boys, by exposing them to such confusing and even eristic arguments?

One of my purposes in this chapter is to answer these criticisms. As we'll see, we cannot get Socrates off the hook by denying that there are problems with his arguments. The problems are undeniable. But I will argue that Socrates has good reasons for making his arguments in the way that he does. Like Clinias, Charmides, Alcibiades, and other young interlocutors, Lysis and Menexenus are well-born and ambitious. But what distinguishes them from the others is their apparent interest in eristic. Socrates recognizes this, and he therefore frames his arguments in a form that they can understand and in which they are interested in order to engage their attention. In this way, he can get them to start practicing real philosophy and to join him in a true philosophical friendship. Socrates

[186] Some prominent twentieth century scholars, including Cornford and Guthrie (1975), had similar views about the dialogue. Grote's own view, by contrast, is that the dialogue gives a good demonstration of a philosophical search; thus it's fitting that it is fragmentary and inconclusive. He says, "To multiply defective explanations, and to indicate why each is defective, is the whole business of the dialogue." He continues, "The process of trial and error, the most general fact of human intelligence, is even better illustrated when the search is unsuccessful" (186).

[187] According to Scott (2000), Lysis and Menexenus are probably twelve or thirteen. Scott cites as evidence the fact that Lysis still goes by his father's name (204e3-4) and that he is accompanied by a pedagogue (208c3-4), both to the Palaistra and to and from tutors. In any event, they are just about the youngest interlocutors that Socrates meets in Plato's dialogues, the one possible exception being the slave boy in the *Meno.*

thus recognizes, engages, and then transforms the boys' misplaced love of argument and competition into a more productive love of wisdom.

In this chapter, my focus will be on Socrates' protreptic efforts, at first with Lysis alone, and later with both boys. I describe how he conducts his arguments, why the methods he uses are important, and I give some suggestions about how Plato may also be operating in similar ways upon his readers.

1. Framing the dialogue

1.1 The topic of the *Lysis* is love, broadly conceived—whether it be the erotic love that a lover has for his beloved (his *paidika,* (205a-6c)), the love parents have for their children (Lysis' parents love for him (207c ff.), a parent's love for her baby (213a)), the loves that people exhibit in their pursuits of impersonal things (philosophy, love of horses, etc. (212d-e)), or the love shared by friends (such as between Lysis and Menexenus (207c, 211d-2a)). The topic seems *so* broad, in fact, that the unity of the dialogue, and its efficacy at addressing its question, is an interpretive problem.[188] But most commentators agree that the dialogue is about love (or attraction) in some broad sense. Perhaps the dialogue seeks to explain and unify the disparate kinds of love that characterize human life.[189]

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[188] Grote writes, "In truth, no one general solution is attainable, such as Plato here professes to search for. [...] The problem, as set forth by Plato, is conceived in great generality. In what manner does one man become the friend of another? How does a man become the object of friendship or love from another? What is that object toward which our love or friendship is determined? These terms are so large, that they include everything belonging to the Tender Emotion generally" (186-8). Robinson (1986) is more specific about the problem. He argues that Socrates is seeking to account for "two separate phenomena"—one-way attraction and mutual friendship—and thus his search cannot be successful (79-81).

[189] According to one common line of interpretation, Plato's purpose in the *Lysis* is to *distinguish* different kinds of love, in the way that Aristotle does with friendship in *Nic. Eth.* VIII-IX. See, e.g., Hoerber (1959), Pangle (2001), Jenks (2005). But most commentators who read the dialogue as putting forward positive answers to its questions about *philia* think that Plato is looking for an theory that unifies and accounts for all

In accordance with this topic, Plato frames the *Lysis* as a contrast between the incompetent, self-centered love of the panderer and the more correct, "genuine [*gnêsios*]" love (222a6-7), represented here by Socrates.[190] In this, the *Lysis* resembles the *Euthydemus*, in which Plato compares true philosophy and philosophical protreptic, represented by Socrates, with the superficially similar but significantly different activities of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

1.2 In the *Lysis*, the incompetent lover is Hippothales. When the *Lysis* opens, Socrates is traveling across town when he meets two older youths, Hippothales and Ctesippus.[191] Hippothales, it turns out, is in love with a younger boy, Lysis. But, according to Ctesippus, Hippothales has no idea how to approach Lysis. So far, he has been making up silly songs and odes praising Lysis' father and ancestors. Socrates offers to give Hippothales a demonstration of how he ought to behave, and how to have a conversation with Lysis.

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of the various manifestations of love and attraction in our lives: see Versenyi (1975), Tessitore (1990), Gonzalez (1995), Reshotko (1997), Penner and Rowe (2005), and Justin (2005).

[190] The comparison of different kinds of love (higher and lower, better and worse, more and less truly love) is a persistent theme in the *Symposium*. Pausanius compares "Common" and "Heavenly Aphrodite" (180d-e); Eryximachus claims that "the love manifested in health is fundamentally distinct from the love manifested in disease" (186b); and, most significantly, the paired speeches of Agathon and Diotima may be read as contrasting two images of love. In light of the previous footnote, however, I should point out that the fact that there is a comparison need not imply that there are two distinct forms of love. It could be that the two loves are manifestations of the same thing, one proper and one defective.

[191] This is the same Ctesippus we saw in the *Euthydemus*. He, as well as Menexenus, is among those present with Socrates in the *Phaedo*, so he is some sort of companion of Socrates (*Phaedo* 59b). In both the *Lysis* and *Euthydemus*, Ctesippus appears to be a pretty acerbic fellow (see his treatment of Hippothales (204c-5d) and his reaction to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus (283e, 284e, 288b, 298e)). There is also some indication in both dialogues that Ctesippus is fond of eristic argumentation: In the *Euthydemus*, he quickly catches on to the brothers' skill (300d, where Socrates calls him "a rogue [*panourgos*];" 303e-4a), and in the *Lysis*, he said to be the teacher of Menexenus, who is described as "*eristikôs*" (211b-c). Some interpreters conclude from these facts that Ctesippus, by means of Menexenus, represents a threat to Lysis and his progress in philosophy (see, e.g., Teloh (1986), p. 71). On the other hand, Ctesippus does show some philosophical promise in the *Euthydemus* (see, for example, his good point about false speaking at 284b). Moreover, it seems to me that Lysis is not innocent of being "*eristikôs*" himself. It takes two to argue, after all. He's probably just not as good at it as Ctesippus and Menexenus are.

Two problems with Hippothales' approach are obvious straight off. The first problem is that his songs and poems focus only on Lysis' external features—according to Ctesippus, Hippothales has been singing about Lysis' father and grandfather, and even about the mythic history of his family (205c-d). If Ctesippus is telling the truth, Hippothales hasn't written about Lysis himself at all, not even about his physical beauty.[192] On hearing Ctesippus' account, Socrates tells the hapless lover, "More than anything, these songs refer to you" (205e).[193] According to Socrates, Hippothales is congratulating *himself* on loving a noble boy, and his songs are not about Lysis at all.

The second problem with Hippothales' approach is that boys so treated tend to "be filled up [*empimplantai*] with proud and boastful thoughts" (206a4). They come to think that they are better than they really are. Of course, this is bad from Hippothales' perspective, because, as Socrates points out, if Lysis gets puffed up and arrogant he'll be harder for Hippothales to catch (206a-b). But Hippothales also runs the risk of ruining Lysis. Hippothales is an example of the corrupting flatterer mentioned in the *Republic* as one of the reasons that philosophically talented youths do not realize their potential.[194]

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[192] Tessitore (1990) writes, "Hippothales is drawn to Lysis by what is most visible and most public; it is his apparent lack of access to Lysis' soul that makes Hippothales ridiculous in the eyes of his companions" (116).

[193] Translations of the *Lysis* are my own, with help from Penner and Rowe (2005).

[194] In *Republic 6*, Socrates describes how the qualities that suit a person for philosophy tend to corrupt the soul that has them and to drag it away from philosophy (491b ff.). One threat is from flatterers:

> We agreed that ease in learning, a good memory, courage, and high-mindedness belong to the philosophic nature. [...] And won't someone with a nature like that be first among the children in everything, especially if his body has a nature that matches that of his soul? [...] Then I suppose that, as he gets older, his family and fellow citizens will want to make use of him in connection with their own affairs. [...] Therefore, they'll pay court to him with their requests and honors, trying by their flattery to secure for themselves ahead of time the power that is going to be his. [...] What do you think someone like that will do in such circumstances [...]? Won't he be filled with impractical expectations and think himself capable of managing the affairs, not only of the Greeks, but of the barbarians as well? And as a result, won't he exalt himself to great heights and be filled up [*empimplamenon*] with pretension and pride that is empty and lacks understanding? (494a-d)

He's not a bad guy. He wants to learn, if only so that he can succeed in convincing his beloved to love him back (to become "*prosphilês*" (206c3)). But he is ignorant, and ignorant people can do a lot of damage without meaning to.

1.3 Socrates, by contrast, seeks to demonstrate how a lover *should* approach his beloved. Socrates "has a conversation [*dialegesthai*]" *with* Lysis, not about him with others (206c6-7). But most importantly, Socrates seeks to see and engage with Lysis himself. Near the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates says something very revealing:

> I am, myself, of mean ability [*phaulos*], indeed useless, in respect to everything else, but this much has been given me—I don't know how—from god, the capacity quickly to recognize a lover [*eronta*] and an object of love [*erômenon*]. (204b8-c2)

He's talking about Hippothales, about how he can see that Hippothales is in love, but this statement neatly encapsulates something important about how Socrates sees himself and his mission.[195] Socrates' talent is to recognize people as lovers and the objects of their love. He may be "useless in respect to everything else," but this one talent that he has is very important.[196] That is because of the fundamental role that a person's loves play in her

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Socrates does not say, in the *Lysis*, that Hippothales is looking to get a share of Lysis' future power. But he does seem to love Lysis only for his own sake, and his praises do risk making Lysis "exalt himself" and "be brimming with pretensions."

[195] Socrates must be making a statement of more general significance here, because what he's saying does not really apply very well to the case of Hippothales. Socrates *can't* perceive Hippothales' *erômenon*; he has to ask.

[196] Jenks (2005) claims that, for Plato, a person's character is partly constituted by what she loves, and he argues that the "constitutive dimension of friendship," as Jenks calls it, is in the background throughout the *Lysis* (71). For example, during Socrates' first discussion with Menexenus, Socrates points out there are horse-lovers, quail-lovers, dog-lovers, and, significantly, wisdom-lovers (*philosophoi*) (212d). The characters of each of these classes of people are, to some extent, constituted by their loves. This is highlighted, he says, by the connection made near the end of the dialogue between friendship and kinship (the *oikeios*). The constitutive dimension of *philia* also appears in other dialogues: For example, in the *Republic*, people (and parts of the soul) are distinguished by what they are "*philos*" to (*philochrêmatos*, *philotimos,* etc.). If this interpretation is correct, it becomes even more important that Socrates can recognize people's loves. In so doing, he is recognizing what kind of people they are.

motivational economy. To recognize what a person loves is to recognize and identify something crucial about her.[197] If he is to carry out his mission, Socrates needs to identify lovers and their loves for two reasons: First, a person must love the right things if she is going to live well. For example, if she loves and thus takes *epimeleia* for her possessions more than her soul, she cannot be happy. Second, a person's loves provide the motivational handles upon which Socrates needs to get a grip in order to change her orientation. Socrates needs to engage his interlocutors' loves, their central motivations, in order to get them to live better lives.[198]

In this dialogue, Socrates' primary target is Lysis. But there are others. In particular, at least when Menexenus is available, Socrates treats him no differently than he does Lysis.[199] Hippothales and Ctesippus are also members of Socrates' audience; they want to hear Socrates demonstrate how they should talk to their beloveds. Finally, there are the readers. As in the *Euthydemus*, Plato's efforts with his readers are to some extent

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[197] Compare *Laches* 187e-8a: Nicias warns Lysimachus that Socrates forces those who converse with him to "submit to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto. [...] Socrates will not let him go before he has well and truly tested every last detail." It may seem that Nicias is claiming that Socrates reveals and tests beliefs, not loves. But I doubt Plato draw a sharp distinction between the two. When Socrates tests your beliefs, he tests your beliefs about happiness and virtue (see Chapter 1). But there is an intimate connection between your loves and your conception of happiness—the loves that define your life partly constitute your conception of happiness.

[198] Compare the true art of rhetoric, as described by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*: "Since the nature of speech is in fact to direct the soul, whoever intends to be a rhetorician must know how many kinds of soul there are. [...] The orator must learn all this well, then put his theory into practice and develop the ability to discern each kind clearly as it occurs in the actions of real life" (271d-e). Socrates' talent seems to be an undeveloped version of this skill.

[199] Interpreters disagree about Menexenus' role. Penner and Rowe argue that he is, like Lysis, a young boy whom Socrates hopes to engage in philosophical enquiry (see esp. 14-15). The only difference is that he has the disadvantage of having missed an important phase of the conversation. Others (such as Teloh, mentioned above) cast Menexenus in a role as a competing and negative influence on Lysis' attention, a threat to his living well as much as Hippothales. Menexenus, they claim, represents sophistic eristic, which they trace through Ctesippus to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus (from whom Ctesippus supposedly learned the eristic method—see footnote above). I agree with Penner and Rowe on this issue. On my account, Socrates is counting on Lysis and Menexenus becoming partners to each other in self-improvement. If so, he cannot see Menexenus as a threat from whom he must pull Lysis away.

parallel to what he shows Socrates doing in the dialogue. There are, however, two important differences between what Socrates does and what Plato is doing. The first is that, unlike Socrates, Plato cannot directly read our loves and customize what he writes for each of us.[200] This is a drawback, but, all of the same, I think that Plato can make some well-founded assumptions about his readers (given that we're reading the *Lysis* at all), and that he shapes the dialogue to engage those loves. The second difference is that, unlike Lysis and Menexenus, we can read over the dialogue again, reexamine its arguments, and so engage with them more deeply.[201] Socrates wants the boys to do this, as well: He urges them, on two occasions, to remember and review the discussion (211b, 222e). But they have to work mostly from memory.

1.4 So what kind of boys are Lysis and Menexenus? What do they love? And how can Socrates get a motivational grip on them?

Plato gives us important clues about the answer to these questions in Socrates' opening exchange with the boys. In accordance with a plan they devise, Socrates, Ctesippus, and Hippothales enter the wrestling school, and Socrates and Ctesippus lure first Menexenus and then Lysis to a quiet corner for a conversation. Once Socrates has the boys together, he asks them some questions. Socrates begins by asking, "Which of the two

[200] It seems to me that Socrates might well have added this to his list of disadvantages of writing at the end of the *Phaedrus* (274b ff). If the true rhetorician's skill consists in recognizing the kind of soul that his audience has, and shaping his speeches to fit and turn these souls in the direction that he wants, it seems that not being able to see the audience would be a limitation.

[201] This is a point that Penner and Rowe make on several occasions, in response to the charge that their interpretation is overly complex, suggesting that the *Lysis* is a text that requires "multiple, even endless, re-reading." They respond, "The *Lysis* just is a complex text, no doubt intended for close reading and study; perhaps it was even—among other things?—some kind of school text (i.e. within the Academy [...])" (73-4, fn. 9).

of you is older?" This is not an unusual question for an adult to ask boys, but Menexenus' response is strange. He says, "We dispute about that [*amphisbêtoumen*]" (207c). How could they dispute about age? Well, ancient Greeks did not have birth certificates, so it is at least possible.[202] But still, it is an odd way to answer such a straightforward question. Socrates follows up: Do you also "quarrel [*erizoit' an*]" about who has the nobler family and better looks?[203] They say that they do (207c). Of course, their arguments are friendly. When Socrates asks, the boys laugh and agree that they are friends. But these few short questions reveal the tone of their relationship. Like my friends and me when we were that age (and much older), they are fiercely competitive. Moreover, their competitiveness takes a particular form: They like to "dispute" with each other, just for the sake of disputing. Socrates recognizes this, and, as we'll see, he keys onto their competitiveness as a way to draw them into a discussion and, eventually, the proper practice of philosophy.

They are friends, however, and, as Socrates tells them, "friends have everything in common [*koina ta ge philôn*]." According to Socrates' account of the story, he was about to ask them who is juster and wiser, but Menexenus was called away to perform some sacrificial duties (207c-d). But, as we'll see, these questions foreshadow the general pattern of the dialogue, with Socrates moving the boys away from competition and trying to get them to use their energies cooperatively and constructively. After all, justice and wisdom are also common concerns among friends. Not only do true friends help each other

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[202] Not many commentators have noticed this point. Bordt (1998) thinks that the boys could not really have been arguing about their age, since they would have *known* how old they were. Penner and Rowe disagree with Bordt's interpretation, but they concede his point about what the boys know: "Why shouldn't two young boys be imagined as disputing about something they knew perfectly well was indisputable, if it mattered to them enough?" (13, fn. 1).

[203] As Penner and Rowe note, Socrates' use of the word "*erizô*" is significant (14). Socrates is identifying what the boys are doing.

become more just and wise, but they would also have good reason to do so, since great harms (and benefits) can come from those who are close to you. This is a recurring and, I think, important theme in Plato—see, e.g., *Apology* 25c-e; *Rep.* 1.351c-2a; *Lysis* 214b-c.

2. Socrates' discussion with Lysis

2.1 After Menexenus is called away, Socrates initiates a one-on-one conversation with Lysis (207d-211c). In this passage, Socrates begins his attempt to win Lysis over to the philosophical life. Socrates challenges Lysis' preconceptions and starts to introduce Lysis to a new way of looking at the world. He does this, I argue, by recognizing what Lysis loves, engaging with those loves, and attempting to turn them in a more fruitful direction.

This passage has attracted attention from scholars in no small part because of the thesis for which Socrates appears to be arguing. He's ostensibly trying to refute Lysis' belief that his parents love him, and to show to the boy that, in fact, neither they nor anyone else will love him until he becomes wise. But if he should become wise, Socrates argues, *everyone* will love him. If this argument works, it would provide a powerful incentive for Lysis to pursue wisdom. But it seems like an odd conclusion for Socrates to advance.[204] Does he really believe that Lysis' parents do not love him? Does he mean for Lysis to believe it? Or is there something more going on here?[205]

[204] As Penner and Rowe say, "it would ultimately be hard to swallow any theory that started by disallowing parental love" (33, fn. 53).

[205] Penner and Rowe, Roth, and Bordt all think that the absurdity of Socrates' conclusion is a signal that we need to look more closely at the argument that precedes it, though they disagree about what lesson we are supposed to learn. By contrast, Vlastos (1973) argues that Socrates does hold that parents do not love their children. In that paper, he argues that for Plato, "the individual, in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality, will never be the object of our love" (31).

Now, the fact that Socrates' conclusion is counterintuitive is not in itself a reason to be suspicious of it. But there is more. Besides its paradoxical conclusion, the argument itself has several notable flaws. Worse, many of these are flaws that Plato would have recognized as flaws and, in some cases, explicitly called attention to in other dialogues.

These features of the passage demand explanation. In the present section (§2), I present the argument. Put briefly, Socrates' argument with Lysis goes something like this:

> Person x loves person y only if x wants y to be as happy as possible.
> y is happy only if y does what y desires.
> But x wants and allows y to do what y desires only if y is wise and useful.
> Therefore, x loves y only if y is wise and useful.
> But Lysis is not wise and useful.
> So Lysis' parents do not love him.

Of course, things are more complicated in the text. In fact, even making out what precisely the argument *is supposed to be* is a challenge, given all of its twists and turns. I'll trace the argument through its various stages, and describe the most egregious flaws that I find. Then, in the following section (§3), I discuss what to make of this argument—why Plato writes it in the way that he does, what effect it is supposed to have on Lysis, and what positive lessons we can draw from it about love or *philia*, knowledge, and happiness.

2.2 Socrates begins by presenting Lysis with a puzzle: "Surely, Lysis, [...] your mother and father love you very much?" (207d5-6). Lysis agrees that they do. If they love him, they would want him to be as happy as possible ("*eudaimonestaton*") (207d7). But surely, Socrates says to Lysis, if your parents love you and want you to be happy, they wouldn't make it so that you are a slave and do nothing you desire. But in fact, Socrates proceeds to show, that's exactly what they do. Lysis isn't allowed to drive the chariot (208a), control

(*archein*) the mules (208b), or touch his mother's weaving (208d). In fact, he isn't even allowed to control himself; he's put under a pedagogue, a slave. On hearing this, Socrates exclaims, "What a terrible thing, a free man being ruled by a slave! [*ê deinon ... eleutheron onta hupo doulou archesthai*]" (208c5). The slave takes him to teachers, who also rule him and don't let him do what he desires. Far from allowing Lysis to do what he desires, Socrates says, Lysis' parents keep him in "perpetual slavery to someone," so that he *never* does what he desires (208e5-6).

Here's the schematic form of this first movement, according to my reconstruction. Socrates seems to be driving toward the conclusion that Lysis' parents don't love him:

P1.	x loves y only if x wants y to be as happy as possible.	(agreed)
P2.	y is happy only if y does what y desires.[206]	(agreed)
[C1.][207]	Therefore, x loves y only if x wants y to do what y desires.	(P1, P2)
[P3.]	If x wants that P, x allows it to happen that P.	(Relates *wanting* and allowing)
[C2.]	Therefore, x loves y only if x allows y to do what y desires.[208]	(C1, P3)
P4.	But Lysis' parents do not allow him to do *anything* that he desires.	(From examples)[209]
[C3.]	Therefore, Lysis' parents do not love Lysis. (Not stated, but suggested.)	(C2, P4)

[206] It is somewhat unclear, from the text, how strong P2 and thus C1 and C2 are supposed to be: Is it "y is happy only if y does *some* of what y desires" or "y is happy only if y does *whatever* y desires"? Not surprisingly, this makes a big difference. On the former, only a few of my desires need to be satisfied for me to count as happy; on the latter, I'd need *all* of my desires to be satisfied. Socrates is not clear about which he means: Sometimes he puts P2 in first, weaker form (as in 207e1-2), sometimes in the second, stronger form (see, e.g., 207e7 and 208e1). So what does he mean? I think that what he must have in mind (and is not expressing clearly here) is something like the following: x is happy *to the extent that* x can do what he desires (see below). Therefore, if none of his desires are satisfied, he is not happy at all. If some are satisfied but others are not, he will be somewhat happy. But he is "as happy as possible" only if *all* of his desires are satisfied. This does not fit the text perfectly, but it seems to me to make for a much more reasonable theory than either of the extreme versions of P2.

[207] Brackets mark unstated moves in the argument.

[208] If I am right in my interpretation of P2 (see footnote above), then C2 will read: "x loves y only if x allows y to do *whatever* y desires." That is because, according to P1, one person loves another only if he wants her to be *as happy as possible*. But she is happy as possible, according to my version of P2, only if she does whatever she desires.

[209] I put P4 in this strong form because that seems to be the point that Socrates is trying to make: Lysis' parents keep him in "perpetual slavery" and do not let him do anything he desires to do. As it turns out, of course, this is not true. See below.

Notice that Socrates does not draw the conclusion (at least for now) that Lysis' parents do not love him. But direction of the argument is clear.

Notice Socrates' strategy in this argument. He takes the role of the indignant but shortsighted child, who thinks he should be treated as a grown-up and allowed to do the things that grown-ups do, and he forces Lysis to take the more mature point of view and defend his parents. Lysis does not think his parents treat him like a slave (at least in his cooler moments), and he thinks they have good reasons for what they do. He also believes strongly that they love him. But if he wants to vindicate his belief, he needs to find a way to escape the argument. Socrates is forcing Lysis to think through his presuppositions and to develop a more sophisticated understanding of his relationship with his parents.

So what is the way out? Is there a way out? It seems to me that there is, indeed, a serious problem in the series of moves from P2-C2, a mistake about what is necessary for happiness. Moreover, this is a mistake similar to one that Plato has Socrates point out explicitly in the *Gorgias*.

According to P2, a person is happy only if he does what he desires (*epithumei*).[210] As the idea is developed in the subsequent argument, Socrates seems to be appealing to the common sense idea that a person is happy *to the extent that* she is able to do what she happens to desire at the time. I'll call this the *occurrent desire satisfaction* view of

[210] According to the LSJ, *epithumeô* means "set one's heart upon a thing, long for, covet, desire" (sv. *epithumeô*). I think it has a sense of a more or less impulsive attachment, whereas *boulomai* often has a sense of a more deliberative desire—a willing or a rational purpose. In this passage, however, Plato does not discriminate between *epithumeô* and *boulomai*. Both are used in nearly identical contexts: compare, for example, 207e7—"*diakôluousi poiein hôn an epithumêis;*"—and 208a1—"*diakôluousi touto poiein ho an boulêi;*" In the context of the argument, though, even if the words have different senses, it does not make a difference to Socrates' point. Children should not always be allowed to do what they set their hearts on or what they will more deliberatively.

happiness (**ODS**). So, according to ODS, if I "come to desire" to drive my father's chariot, I am happy only if I drive the chariot and no one gets in my way.[211] Socrates confronts ODS elsewhere, and he rejects it. Polus, in the *Gorgias*, believes (and thinks that everyone agrees) that a person is happiest who can do whatever he thinks best (466b-c, 470c-1d). He believes that being able to do what one thinks best is great power and that those who have this power, like tyrants and orators, are happy. Socrates argues against Polus' view. He suggests, and Polus concedes, that if a person "has little sense [*noun mê echôn*]," it is not good for him that he be able to do what he thinks best (466e10), because he will fail to do what is really good for him and so will not get what he *really wants*, good things. As Socrates puts it, "so long as acting as one thinks best *coincides* with acting beneficially, it is good, and this, evidently, is great power" (470a-b). A person with knowledge can act correctly and thus become happy. Without knowledge, however, having the capability to do what one thinks best is a bad thing and does not produce happiness. So ODS is false.[212]

Socrates' examples here in the *Lysis* suggest that a similar response is in order. After all, Lysis' parents have good reasons not to allow Lysis to do what he desires (especially if he happens to desire the sorts of things Socrates mentions). Children's

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[211] "Come to desire" is my translation of the aorist "*epithumêsêis*" (208a2). The aorist here has an incipient force and emphasizes that the desire in question is one that Lysis *currently* has. He hasn't desired to drive the chariot all along; this is just a desire he has (somewhat capriciously) come to have.

[212] On the other hand, it is possible that Socrates accepts similar theory. Irwin (1986), for example, argues that Socrates believes that happiness is having all of one's desires satisfied (208). The theory that Irwin attributes to Socrates is actually pretty close to ODS. The difference is that, according to ODS, I can satisfy a desire only by achieving its object. Polus' tyrant wants power so that he can *kill* the person he wants to kill; the child wants to drive the chariot. But, on Irwin's version, a person can also ensure satisfied desires by giving up desires that are hard to satisfy (206). This is clearly not what the tyrant or child has in mind.

From the *Gorgias* passages, we might infer what we could call the "*real* desire satisfaction" theory of happiness (RDS). According to RDS, x is happy to the extent that x's real, deepest, or most final desires or wants (*boulêsês*) are satisfied. This theory fits the text, but it may be vacuous, especially if our deepest desire turns out to be for happiness.

desires are unreliable, and they do not know when or how to pursue them correctly. Suppose that Lysis' parents allow him to drive the chariot or whip the mules. He's barely a teenager, and he'd probably hurt himself or damage family property. He wouldn't be happy if that happened. In fact, that Lysis' parents put restrictions on him to some extent *shows* that they love him. They are taking care of him, so that he might someday become happy and do what he *really* wants (in the sense of "want" defined in the *Gorgias*). But this will happen only if they restrict him now, give him a guardian, and make him go to classes. They have a plan for Lysis someday to achieve happiness and autonomy, but it requires them to restrict his freedom when he is young. (Ideally, the parent's greater knowledge and experience guides the child, so that the child acts correctly and beneficially, even though the child does not know what he's doing.) Lysis' parents treat him the way they do *because* they love him.[213]

In summary, then: If we take Socrates' argument from the *Gorgias* to heart and revise our understanding of P2 in accordance with the points he makes there about the connection between happiness and doing what you want, we see that the various practices of Lysis' parents that Socrates mentions no longer serve as evidence that they do not love him or want him to be happy. These practices are compatible with or even necessary parts

[213] There is another problem with the argument above. The problem is with P3, which says that if x wants that P, x will allow it to happen that P. This is not necessarily true. Suppose that I want my wife to go to her tai chi class tonight. But, at the same time, I have a greater desire to drive to campus to give the final exam for my class. However, we only have one car, so only one of the two things can actually happen. Thus, because of my strong desire to give the final exam, I won't allow my wife to take the car and go to her class, despite my desire that she do so. The point is that a person's not allowing something to happen is not by itself evidence that he does not *want* it to happen. This might be a way to explain (some of) the behavior of Lysis' parents. They do love him and want him to be happy. They'd like him to do what he desires, and they do not enjoy frustrating his desires. But they prefer that their possessions remain intact, and that their son stay alive. So they keep him away from the chariot, mules, and weaving, knowing that his being able to do what he wants with those things would frustrate their greater desire not to have them ruined.

of a plan that they have for Lysis eventually to become happy, a plan that is evidence of their care for their son.

2.3 Lysis takes up Socrates' challenge. Indeed, his response shows that he *sees* it as a challenge. He proposes that his parents treat him the way they do because he has not yet come of age (209a). He's not grown up, so of course he is not allowed to do grown-up things. But he believes that when he grows up, his parents *will* hand things over to him.[214] Then he'll be able to do what he desires, without having to listen to tutors or a pedagogue.

Lysis' answer is reasonable, but by Socrates' lights, it is wrong. At this point, we might expect Socrates to explain to Lysis, as he does for Polus in the *Gorgias*, the difference between doing what you desire or what seems best and doing what you really *want*. But he doesn't. Instead, he suggests that the problem is with premise P4. Actually, Socrates says, your parents *do* allow you to control some things. When they want something read or written, they turn to you, and they let you do whatever you want when it comes to tuning and playing the lyre (209a-b). Why do they turn to him in these cases, but not the others? At Socrates' prompting, Lysis eventually sees: "I imagine," he says, "that it's because these are things that I know [*epistamai*], whereas the others I don't" (209c2). So, according to Socrates, as soon as Lysis' father considers Lysis to be "thinking better [*beltion* [...] *phronein*]" than he is, he'll turn everything, both himself and his estate, over to Lysis (209c).

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[214] Lysis' attitude here is probably similar to Clinias'. In the last chapter, I suggested that Clinias believes (without ever having thought about it too deeply) that the things that he needs to be happy will come to him mostly as a result of good fortune (*eutuchia*) (see §§ 1.1-1.2). So also Lysis might believe that since he's had the luck of being born in an aristocratic household, he does not have to work hard, because the things he desires will be provided for him when he inherits his father's estate. In both cases, Socrates seeks to convince the boys that good fortune will not get them what they want; rather, they need wisdom.

So begins the next phase of the argument. Socrates argues that, in fact, people generally behave this way. They "will turn to [*epitrepsein*]" those who seem more knowledgeable than others. Lysis' neighbor, Socrates says, will follow "the same rule [*horos*]" as Lysis' father and will turn over his estate to Lysis as soon as he considers Lysis to "think better" than he does (209d1-3). So also will the Athenians, and even the Great King of Persia (209d-210a): "In fact, he [the Great King] will turn everything over to us rather than to his son or himself, in any area in which we appear to him wiser than the two of them" (210a5-8). According to Socrates, then, the following general principle is true:

C5. x turns things over to y in area A if and only if y appears to be more knowledgeable (than anyone else) to x in A. (Epagogê from examples)

There is something deeply counterintuitive about this reasoning. Socrates claims that the Persian King follows the *same rule* as Lysis' father in deciding how to dispose of his property. Is that true? We wouldn't think so. Or, at least, even if it is true that the father and the King exhibit externally similar behaviors, they do not do so for the same *reasons*. Lysis' father presumably turns over his estate to Lysis, his oldest son, because he loves Lysis and wants the boy to be happy, or because he is following the custom. But the others have neither of these motives with respect to Lysis. In fact, the neighbor and the Great King would likely be inclined, by these same motives, *not* to turn their estates over to Lysis. They'd rather give them to their own sons.

According to Bordt (2000), Socrates' examples here are *meant* to be absurd, because Socrates is constructing a *reductio* of the notion that utility is sufficient for *philia*. He writes,

> The first example seems rather straightforward: His father will allow him to run the household if Lysis is competent to do so. [...] But now Socrates claims that Lysis' neighbor will do exactly the same; this already sounds weird [...] The last examples are as funny as they are absurd: The king of the Persians will of course never allow Lysis to throw ashes in the eyes of his son, nor will he allow him to put tons of salt in the soup. [...] Utility is not a sufficient condition [for friendship]. (161)

I am not sure I agree with Bordt, in part because I am not sure that the examples are as obviously absurd as he thinks they are. But they make sense *only if* we read them a certain way. We have to imagine that what motivates the characters in the examples to turn things over is their desire that their estates or affairs be well managed. So, for example, a wealthy estate owner (like Lysis' neighbor) *might* turn his estate over to a manager or steward (an *epitropos*). When he hires an *epitropos*, he is looking mostly for competence.[215] The same goes for the Athenians when selecting leaders, and the Great King when selecting cooks, doctors, and governors. All else being equal, they want someone who *can do the job*.

Nevertheless, it seems (at least from an intuitive perspective) that there is an important difference between Lysis' father turning to his son and the Great King turning to an *epitropos* or satrap. As Socrates himself said at the beginning, when someone loves another, he wants her to be happy (P1). Therefore, if Lysis' father loves him, he would turn to Lysis because he loves his son and wants him to be happy. By contrast, the others would be turning to Lysis only because he is useful to *them*. Presumably, they wouldn't really care if Lysis becomes happy as a result. This difference in motives becomes

[215] Of course, the manager should also be honest. But the issue of moral character is not on the table in this passage. Socrates is trying to convince Lysis that he needs to be *wise* if he wants people to turn to him. Perhaps he *also* needs to convince them that he is not corrupt. But that is a further question. See Rowe and Penner (2005), p. 30. Socrates may also believe that, since virtue is wisdom, a truly wise person cannot fail to be just and honest. But that is beyond the scope of this passage.

important later in the argument, when Socrates seeks to draw an inferential connection between "turning-to" and "loving" (see §2.5 below). From the fact that Lysis' father turns to him, we can infer that he loves Lysis. (Think of the way that writing someone into your will can be evidence of affection or regard.) But not so with the Great King's turning to a wise doctor or satrap. Thus, while C5 may be true, it seems to be *made* true in different ways in different cases.[216]

2.4 Socrates draws a sweeping conclusion from these cases, at 210a9-c5, in what we might call the "grand conclusion". For the sake of brevity, I summarize the main points:

C6. If y has wisdom in A,[217]
- a. Everyone will turn things over ("*epitrepsousin*") to y in A.
- b. y will do whatever y wants ("*boulômetha*") in A.
- c. No one will get in y's way in A.
- d. y will be free (*eleutheros*) with respect to A.
- e. y will be in control of others (*allôn archôn*) in A.

C7. If y has no wisdom in A,
- a. No one will turn things over to y in A.
- b. Everyone will prevent y from doing what y wants in A.
- c. y will be a subject (*hupêkoos*) of others in A.
- d. Things will be alien (*allotria*) to y with respect to A, for y will get no benefit from them.

How are C6 and C7 derived? Socrates seems to draw them from the immediately preceding discussion ("Therefore, this is how it is, dear Lysis [*outôs ara echei,* [...] *ô phile Lysi*]" (210a9)). Perhaps he thinks that C6 and C7 merely restate and expand upon C5.

[216] There may be another problem, if Socrates is using different senses of knowing in the different cases. Socrates' terminology is very fluid. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I don't think he wants to commit to any particular term that might have connotations about what the knowledge in question really is, since he does not know what it is. But there may be a difference between the "good thinking" or "knowledge" that Lysis' father wants Lysis to have (practical wisdom, the ability to live well?) and the kind of "good thinking" the others are looking for (productive skill?).

[217] This passage provides an example of the variety of expressions that Socrates uses for what I call "having wisdom." In C6, he puts it thus: "with regard to those things, concerning which we become [practically] wise [*eis men tauta, ha an phronimoi genômetha*] [...]" (210a9-b1). In C7, he says, "with regard to those things about which we do not obtain sense or intelligence [*eis ha d' an noun mê ktêsômetha*] [...]" (210b6).

But notice that there is an important difference between C5 (see 210a5-7, etc.) and C6-C7 (210a9-b1): In C6-C7, Socrates has dropped the qualification in C5 about "appearing" or "seeming." The examples from which Socrates derives C5 turn on the idea that people turn to those who *appear* wise, not to those who actually *are wise.* But, as Plato well knows, this is a big difference. He often has Socrates make the point that people are generally not very good at distinguishing true from apparent wisdom. Orators and others can appear wise, when they are not. Moreover, the people who actually do know, when put in front of common people, cannot easily show others that they are wise.[218]

The gap between *appearing* to be wise and actually *being* wise is indicative of a larger general problem with Socrates' argument here. The larger problem is that, at least as Socrates has constructed the argument here, the conclusions C6 and C7 would seem to be made true by what *others* do. That is, if Lysis becomes wise (*phronimos*), *others* (the Athenians, the Great King) will turn things over to him, let him do what he wants, and so on. Therefore, Lysis should become wise so that *other people* will entrust things to him. Now, this is not an implausible suggestion. People want things to be well managed, and so if you acquire useful skills, they will give you a sort of freedom of action. But, according to this way of thinking of things, one must depend on others to get this freedom. Since, however, most people are so bad at recognizing wisdom when they see it, it is a somewhat tenuous hope that Socrates is holding out for Lysis here.[219]

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[218] Socrates makes this point, for example, in his discussion with Gorgias at *Gorg.* 459a ff.: "Oratory doesn't need to have any knowledge of the state of their subject matters; it only needs to have discovered some device to produce persuasion in order to make itself appear to those who don't have knowledge that it knows more than those who actually do have it" (459b-c).

[219] Socrates occasionally suggests that we should not rest our hopes for happiness on the actions of others. One example comes from the *Crito*: "Would that the majority could inflict the greatest of evils, for they would then be capable of the greatest good, and that would be fine, but now they cannot do either" (44d).

At the same time, however, parts of conclusions C6 and C7 resonate with important themes in Plato's philosophy. This becomes evident if we remember Socrates' point in the *Gorgias* about the difference between doing what seems best when you do not know and doing what you really want. Happiness comes not (as ODS claims) from doing what you happen to desire (what seems best), but (on the contrary) from acting correctly and beneficially, in accordance with knowledge. It is only by acting correctly that a person can get what he really wants, happiness.[220] If we apply this lesson to Socrates' grand conclusion, we see that at least some of its sub-conclusions can be supported on other grounds, without relying on the actions of other people.[221] Thus, (C6(b)) if we do not have wisdom, we will not get what we want ("*boulômetha*"), happiness. We will be "subject" to outside forces (perhaps our own irrational desires[222]) (C7(c)), and we will not be free or in control of anything (C6(d) and (e)). All things will be alien (*allotria*) to us, because, so long as we do not have the wisdom to use them correctly, we will get no benefit from them (C7(d)).[223]

Socrates' grand conclusion, therefore, contains interesting ideas, some of which recall arguments that he makes in other dialogues. But Socrates does not develop them, and he derives them by means of an argument (appealing to the ability and willingness of

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[220] Cf. *Euthydemus* 278e, which I discussed in the previous chapter. See also Penner and Rowe, pp. 216-230, for an account and defense of the view that what everyone really wants is happiness, which they call "Socratic intellectualism."

[221] Perhaps the most interesting suggestion in this passage is that, if we do not become wise, "everyone will do their best to stop us, and not only strangers, but also our mother and father and anyone else even more familiar (*oikeioteron*)" (210c). Who is more *oikeios* than our mother and father? I think Socrates must mean that we will prevent *ourselves* from achieving our purposes. The ignorant man is his own worst enemy.

[222] This is another common theme in Plato: In the *Gorgias*, Socrates tries to show Callicles that a person who is not in control of his desires, who does not have *sôphrosunê*, cannot be truly free. This is one of the lessons of the leaky jars examples—the un-*sôphrôn* man that Callicles praises is enslaved to his leaky desires, while the man with sound jars is free (493a ff.). In the *Republic*, Socrates makes a similar point about the tyrant. He has lost control of his desires and is now enslaved to them: "Mustn't [the tyrannical man's] soul be full of slavery and unfreedom, with the most decent parts enslaved and with a small part, the maddest and most vicious, as their master?" (577d).

[223] See *Euthydemus* 281a ff, where Socrates argues that supposed goods are not actually good unless one has the wisdom to use them correctly. It is only wisdom that is good in itself.

people to recognize and reward wisdom) that does not seem to fit Socrates' usual approach. To put the point differently: Socrates usually argues we should become wise because wisdom allows us to live better lives, regardless of what others do. He does not (usually) argue that we should become wise so that we'll be hired as household managers.

2.5 After the grand conclusion, Socrates returns to the topic of love. Socrates' reasoning here is difficult to decipher, so I'll quote the whole passage:

> "And so will we be friends to anyone, or will anyone love us in those areas where we are useless [*anôpheleis*]?"
> "Certainly not," he said.
> "So therefore [*nun ara*], neither does your father love you nor does anyone love anyone else, to the extent that he is useless [*achrêstos*]."
> "It seems not."
> "If, therefore, you become wise, my boy, everyone will be friends to you and everyone will belong [*oikeioi*] to you---for you will be useful and good—but if you do not, neither anyone else nor your father will be friend to you, nor your mother or others belonging to you." (209c5-d4)

These are strong claims. How does Socrates support them? How do they fit with what came before? As far as I can determine, the argument goes like this:

[P6.]	x allows y to do what y wants (desires) in A if and only if x turns things over to y in A.	(Unexpressed premise)
[C8.]	Therefore, x allows y to do what y wants in A if and only if y is wise (and so useful) in A.	(C6, C7, P6)[224]
C9.	Therefore, x loves y [in area A] only if y is wise (and useful) in A.	(C2, C8)
P7.	x allows y to do what y wants in A *only if* x loves y.	(Converse of C2)
C10.	Therefore, if y becomes wise (and useful) in A, everyone will love y in A.	(C8, P7)

Earlier (§ 2.3), I argued that Socrates' claims about how the Athenians, Great King, and others would act make sense only if we supposed that they are motivated by their desires

[224] P6 and C5 are necessary to make the connection between "turning over" and "loving."

for *useful* doctors, cooks, managers, etc. In this passage, Socrates makes this point explicit: People turn to us, allow us to do what we want, only in areas where we are wise and, because of our wisdom, useful. Therefore Socrates now leaves no doubt (*pace* Bordt) that it is the wise person's *usefulness* that makes others treat him differently from the ignorant person.[225]

But what does that have to do with love? Socrates apparently draws once again on the idea, from C2, that one person loves another only if he allows her to do what she desires or wants. But no one allows an ignorant and useless person to do what she wants. So (C9) no one loves a person who is not wise. Then, in order to get C10, we'd need P7, the converse of C2. C9 and C10 together give us what Socrates says at 209d.

This argument has two major problems. First, since the argument for C9 depends on Socrates' previous argument (P1-C2), it seems to inherit that earlier argument's problems. The basic problem, as I argued above (§ 2.2), is that a parent's not allowing his child to do what she happens to desire is not, by itself, evidence that the parent doesn't *love* the child. Parents have long-range plans for their children, according to which their children will eventually do what they want, but they make these plans only because they *already* love and are *oikeios* to their children. So the fact that a parent does not turn to her

[225] There is some question about whether, by "useful," Socrates means "useful to the person doing the entrusting" or "useful to the wise person himself." As Vlastos (1973) points out, the text does not say (7). As I mentioned before, the preceding examples pull in different directions. If what I said about Lysis' parents and their plan for him was correct, they want him to be useful or beneficial to *himself*. But clearly the others want someone who is useful to *them*. Vlastos argues, however, that when we look at the dialogue as a whole, it becomes clear that the usefulness at stake is "usefulness to the person doing the entrusting" (8-10).

child when the child is young and ignorant does not, by itself, show that the parent does not love the child.[226]

The second problem is in the argument for C10, the other side of the biconditional. Even if C2 stands, Socrates has given us no reason to accept its converse, P7. In fact, P7 seems quite implausible. Think of the Great King and his estate-manager. Does he *love* his manager, simply because the manager is useful? It seems not. In both cases, then, the argument Socrates puts forward seems to confuse the explanatory order of love and turning-to or allowing. Parents turn to their children *because* they love them. Employers also turn to their employees, but for different reasons.

In making these points, I do not mean to beg any questions against Socrates' argument. The Greek terms that Socrates uses, "*philein*" or "*philos,*" have wider ranges of meaning than the English words "love" and "friend." So it probably does not sound as strange in Greek to suggest that a king "*philei*" his *epitropos*. Moreover, as arguments later in the dialogue reveal, Socrates' notion of *philia* is bound up tightly with the idea of usefulness. The main point that I want emphasize, however, is how *puzzling* Socrates' conclusions should strike us as being. Both here, in these sweeping conclusions about love and wisdom, and before, when he claimed that Lysis' father and other people operate by "the same rule," Socrates lumps together cases that *seem* very different. Perhaps he can convince us that they have something in common, by developing a more sophisticated theory of *philia*. But, for now, the mismatch is jarring.

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[226] On the more sophisticated RDS interpretation of C2 (see fn. 28 above), C2 comes out as being pretty plausible: x loves y only if x wants and allows y to satisfy y's *real* desires or wants. But on this interpretation, the parent's love is not contingent on the child being wise. The child's ignorance, however, would prevent her from turning things over to him.

2.6 So far, Socrates' arguments have been questionable. But the short argument with which he concludes the discussion (210c-d) is outright sophistry. The purpose of this argument seems to be to make the link between C9 and Socrates' intended conclusion that Lysis' parents do not love him.[227] In order to make this link, Socrates needs to show that Lysis really is ignorant, useless in every respect, and so unlovable. The argument proceeds as follows (I've labeled what I take to be the steps of the argument):

> "And so [P8] is it possible to think big [*mega phronein*] in those areas where you are not yet thinking [*oupô phronei*]?"
> "How could it be?" he said.
> "But then, [P9] if *you* need a teacher, you are not yet thinking."
> "True."
> "Neither, then, [C13] are you big-minded [*megalophrôn*], if in fact [C12] you're still mindless [*aphrôn*]."
> "By Zeus, Socrates," he said, "I don't think so! [*Ma Dia* [...] *ô Sôkrates, ou moi dokei.*" (210d4-8)

Socrates has left some gaps that need to be filled in, but the general argument seems to be something like this:

P8.	If y is not yet thinking [*oupô phronein*] in area A, y is not thinking big [*mega phronein*] in A.	(Agreed)
P9.	If y needs a teacher [in A], y is not yet thinking [in A].	(Agreed)
P10.	Lysis has a teacher.	(Agreed earlier; see 208c)

[227] At 210c7, quoted above, Socrates says, "neither does your father love you nor does anyone love anyone else, to the extent that he is useless." This is conditional, and so if the condition is not satisfied for Lysis (if Lysis is not useless), then it does not follow that his father does not love him. Penner and Rowe suggest, at places, that this fact opens up a way to avoid ascribing the conclusion that Lysis' parents do not love him, which they think is "hard to swallow" (33, fn. 53). They write: "One possibility is that loving our [...] children [...] might be 'useful', or beneficial, to us just insofar as it helps produce happiness for us" (34-5). On the other hand, in this passage, Socrates gives an argument for the antecedent. So it does not help to point to the conditional nature of the claim, unless we can show that Socrates does not really believe his argument for the antecedent.

Bordt (2000) uses a different approach to avoiding the supposedly repugnant claim. He says, "The conclusion that Lysis is loved insofar as he is useful is logically wrong. What is true is what Socrates states in 210c8: Lysis is not loved insofar as he is useless. This claim is unproblematic. Parents love their son because he is their son and not because he is useless. But in 210d1-4 [my C9] Socrates concludes from this that Lysis can only be loved insofar as he is useful. But this doesn't follow, of course. Lysis doesn't realize that Socrates is cheating here" (161-2). I do not think Bordt's reading of 210c8 is correct. *"Kath' hoson*" means "to the extent that," not "because."

[C11.] Therefore, Lysis is not yet thinking [*oupô phronein*]. (P9, P10)
C12. Therefore, Lysis is foolish or mindless [*aphrôn*] (= not wise in any area A). (C11)
C13. Therefore, Lysis is not big-thinking [*megalophrôn*]. (P8, C11, C12(?))

C14. Therefore, Lysis' parents do not love Lysis. (210c7-8) (C9, C12)

This is not a sound argument. In fact, when we look at it closely, we find that whatever force it has is rhetorical, not logical, insofar as Socrates is exploiting the similar sounds of the word *phronein* and its cognates. In short, this is what Socrates is saying: if you do not *phronein*, you do not *mega phronein*; but if you have a teacher, you do not *phronein*; Lysis has a teacher, so he is *aphrôn* and not *megalophrôn*. Lysis hears the similar sounds of the words, and he is carried along. But the forms of *phronein* and *phrôn* in this sequence do not mean quite the same thing. P9—the move from needing a teacher to not *phronein*—is true only if *phronein* means something like "understand" or "exercise practical wisdom." (Think of the adjective, *phronimos*—"practically wise".) After all, a student spends a lot of time *thinking* about his subject; he just thinks deficiently and needs a teacher to help him fully to *understand* the subject. But in "*mega phronein*" and the corresponding adjective "*megalophrôn*," the word has quite a different connotation. A person who "thinks big" is (when the word is used in a positive sense) high-minded, high-spirited, or confident, or (in a bad sense) haughty or arrogant.[228] (Socrates might be thinking of Lysis' desire to "think" like a grown-up, a "big" person.) But does a person need to understand a subject before he can "think big" in this sense (as P8 claims)? We wouldn't think so.[229] A high-minded or

[228] In this case, the words must be intended in a good sense, since Socrates implies that this is a quality that Lysis *wants* to have.

[229] A reservation: I could see a very Socratic argument along the following lines: Confidence or high-mindedness is a virtue only if it is beneficial. It is beneficial only if it is a characteristic of a person who has knowledge and can use it correctly. Therefore, a person is confident or high-minded (in a good sense) only if he has knowledge. Otherwise, his apparent confidence is really presumption and ignorance ("*mega*

confident person might seek out teachers, to help him realize his big intentions. So, without more argument, a sufficiently acute Greek speaker, thinking of what the words generally mean, would question P8. But Lysis does not. He hears similar words and agrees.

The crucial move in the argument, however, is the move from C11 to C12, and this move is fallacious. Socrates concludes, from the fact that Lysis does not yet have understanding (C11), that he is *aphrôn* (C12)—foolish, silly, or mindless. The similarity in the words carries Lysis along—you don't *phronein*, you're not *megalophrôn*, so you must be *aphrôn*—but the conclusion does not follow. That's because there is a middle ground between full understanding and complete ignorance. Lysis is a student, but he might be a hard-working and clever student. He's learned many things already (e.g., how to write and play the lyre (209a-b)). More importantly, from Socrates' perspective, Lysis may now see that he lacks knowledge. So the fact that he does not yet *phronein* in the strong sense demanded by C11 does not mean that he is *aphrôn*. The word, coming where it does, sounds like an insult. Socrates brings about his conclusion, not through valid argument, but through wordplay.

3. What's going on?

3.1 So what are we to make of this argument? If my reconstruction is correct, we have a puzzling interpretive problem. The argument's conclusion (C14) is counterintuitive. And the argument itself is has many problems. By my count, there are eight problems with

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phronein" in the bad sense). On this interpretation, P8 comes out true for Socrates. But the ordinary Greek speaker has no way of knowing about the theoretical background, so P8 still would seem incorrect to a sufficiently acute Greek speaker, for the reasons I've outlined.

it, at least two of which Plato would have recognized, given things that Socrates says in other dialogues.[230] But the crucial claims of the argument—C6, C7, C9, and C14—depend on these flawed moves.

What is so odd is that, despite these flaws, many of the most significant conclusions ring true in the context of Socrates' philosophical approach. For example, as I discussed in § 2.4, Socrates' "grand conclusion" (C6, C7) contains many ideas that resonate with Socratic themes. What's more, the argument seems to accomplish Socrates' purposes. Socrates wants to humble Lysis, to counteract the flattery of lovers like Hippothales, and to get the boy to love wisdom.[231] And so he argues that Lysis is mindless, worthless, and unlovable and needs to become wise in order to earn his parents'—and, indeed, everyone else's—love and trust. If Lysis is convinced, it seems that Socrates will have succeeded. In short, Socrates seems to be accomplishing his purposes, but using bad arguments to do it.[232] What's going on?

I faced a similar interpretive problem in the last chapter when I considered Socrates' strong but apparently unsupported conclusion that nothing other than wisdom is good, nothing other than ignorance bad, as well as his poorly supported conclusion that

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[230] That is, the derivation of C2, on the basis of ODS, and the move from "appears wise" to "is wise" in the move from C5 to C6-C7. Also, I will argue that Socrates is also aware that the sub-argument P8-C13 is eristic. On the other hand, in isolation, some of the other questionable moves become more plausible, given typical Socratic assumptions.

[231] Socrates does not, as in the *Euthydemus*, say in so many words that this is his purpose. But (a) he is trying to demonstrate how a genuine lover should behave, and there is good reason to think that, for Plato, a genuine lover would try to make his beloved a philosopher (see below); (b) at 213d7, Socrates says that he is pleased with Lysis' *philosophia* (that is, he's pleased that he's having some success with the boy); and (c) the general pattern of what Socrates is doing closely follows what he does in the *Euthydemus*, where his explicit goal is to convince Clinias to love wisdom.

[232] Compare Penner and Rowe's summary of the argument. They argue that the argument that Socrates gives is flawed, because it relies on "the childish conception of happiness"—what I've been calling ODS. But "Lysis evidently isn't able to see where he has gone wrong, at least in the course of the argument itself, nor are the false moves anywhere explicitly identified (so that Lysis is, formally, refuted: by his lights, his parents don't love him). But the splendid irony is that if he had seen where his difficulties are coming from, the practical outcome of the argument would have been the same: that he needs to acquire knowledge." (31-2)

wisdom ensures good fortune (see esp. § 4.5). It looked like Socrates was cheating, using bad arguments to convince Clinias to love wisdom. I considered the possibility that Socrates knows that he is cheating but believes that his noble goal of turning Clinias to philosophy justifies the means. But I rejected this interpretation and tried to show how to explain the apparently questionable features of Socrates' argument in terms of the dialogue's dramatic and philosophical purposes. A similar strategy can explain many of the odd features of Socrates' discussion with Lysis. There are two passages on which I want to focus that, I believe, provide important clues about what Socrates is doing. The first is the opening sub-argument (my P1-C3); the second is the closing, apparently eristic argument (P8-C13).

3.2 In the opening phase of the discussion, as we saw, Socrates poses Lysis a puzzle: Lysis believes his parents love him. But Socrates' childish complaints force Lysis to take the role of the adult. He must defend his parents' behavior and rethink his beliefs about parental love, freedom, and happiness, in order to respond to Socrates' challenge. At the time, Lysis does not quite know what to say, but eventually, after Socrates' prompting, he sees that knowledge has something to do with it.

I suggest that Socrates' conclusion that Lysis' father does not love him (at 210c7-8, C14) constitutes a similar sort of challenge. Socrates chooses the belief that he targets for refutation very carefully: Lysis' belief in his parents' love is one of the foundations of his young life. As a result, he cannot just accept Socrates' argument lightly. Because this belief is so central to his life, he can hardly help rethinking the argument and its presuppositions

in order to see if its paradoxical conclusion is true.[233] From this perspective, it doesn't matter if C14 *is* true.[234] Its effect on Lysis—getting him to think—is the same.

Indeed, Socrates gives Lysis a lot to think about in this passage. In addition to the claims I mentioned (in C6 and C7) that resonate with Socratic themes, the argument also provides a wealth of puzzles.[235] The puzzle about happiness and doing what you desire is one example. But there are others. For example, would Lysis' father and the Great King of Persia really use the "same rule" in deciding how to dispose of their property? What distinguishes these superficially similar cases, when, in both, we have one person turning to another because the latter appears to be wise? Why *is* wisdom valuable, if not (primarily) to earn the trust of other people? What is the relationship between usefulness and love?

In fact, it is important to keep in mind that, ultimately, the puzzles are meant not only for Lysis. They are also meant for Plato's readers. We are also puzzled by the argument and its counterintuitive conclusion. And indeed, its conclusions apply no less to

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[233] Cf. Scott (2000): "Socrates attempts to emancipate Lysis from the subtle dominion of the most covert kind of trust that presently constrains him. Lysis needs to be cut loose from his customary moorings because, in his present circumstances, his reliance upon familiar authority constrains him much more completely than does his pedagogue or any external master" (65). In other words, Lysis' trust in his parents and other authority figures makes him passive, and Socrates wants to him to take active responsibility for himself (73). This point is worth making, but we should also notice, that, if Scott is right and Socrates does go around undermining children's trust in their parents, making them think that they are not loved, it lends some support to the charge that Socrates corrupts the youth (see Stone (1989)). Tessitore (1990) puts the point less strongly: Lysis is complacent and believes that his parents will give him all that he needs in time. But Socrates challenges this complacency, and leads Lysis "to the conclusion that it is understanding, not an accident of birth, which will make him free [...]" (118).

[234] There is some disagreement in the secondary literature about Plato's attitude toward C14. Some argue that it is his position (Vlastos (1973), most prominently). But others, including Penner and Rowe, Bordt, and Jenks, argue that Socrates does not believe his conclusion that Lysis' parents do not love him, and that the conclusion functions as a *reductio* of some assumption or other upon which the argument rests. When I first started working on this project, I agreed with the latter interpretation, mostly because Socrates' arguments seemed insufficient to establish such a radical conclusion, and, in places (as I've argued) they seem *self-consciously* bad. But now I am not sure. So I'll echo what I said about the controversial arguments in the *Euthydemus*: It is unclear whether C14 is Plato's position, and we do not have decisive reason to say that it is or is not. But the counterintuitive conclusion does serve some important functions, regardless of whether it's true or not.

[235] For an interpretation of the *Lysis* as a source of important philosophical puzzles, see Adams (1992).

Plato's reader than to Lysis. Plato knows that his readers, who are still learning (still "need a teacher"), will find that they aren't much better off than Lysis.[236] Reading the dialogue, we wonder whether *we* are worth loving, whether we are akin or belong (*oikeios*) to anyone. As the continued interest in the *Lysis* demonstrates, we are drawn into Socrates' puzzles just as much as Socrates hopes that Lysis will be.

3.3 The other clue as to how we should read the discussion comes in the closing eristic argument and Lysis' response to it. As I argued above, the force that this sub-argument has is purely rhetorical, not logical. Socrates uses the similar sounds of words to force Lysis into an extreme and unwarranted conclusion, which comes as a sort of verbal throw-down. Socrates effects this conclusion through puns that elide important semantic distinctions. I am reminded of tricks used by the sophists in the *Euthydemus*, such as when Euthydemus maneuvers Ctesippus into the conclusion that a dog is his father (298d-e).[237] Lysis doesn't stand a chance against such tactics.

Why does Socrates argue in this way? Perhaps, as Socrates imagines saying in an aside to Hippothales, he is "humbling [*tapeinounta*]" Lysis and "cutting him down to size

[236] Cf. Gordon (1999): "The dialogues encourage the reader quite literally to play a role in the drama, to interact with it and to philosophize along the way. Insofar as we play a role in the drama, we must ask questions of ourselves, not only the same questions put to the interlocutors by Socrates, but other questions that take us beyond those: Do I know what (virtue, piety, courage) is? Am I arrogant in the way (Meno, Euthyphro, Laches) is? What could Socrates mean by these strange claims? Why is there this inconsistency in Socrates' words? Why is this question never answered in the dialogue? The dialogues in this way engage the reader in question and answer." (52)

[237] Euthydemus concludes, "Since he [the dog] is a father and is yours, the dog turns out to be your father, and you are the brother of puppies, aren't you?" (298e). Of course, the method by which Euthydemus creates this conclusion is different than the method that Socrates uses. Euthydemus exploits the semantic incompleteness of "father" and "yours" (the meaning of the words is incomplete without specifying *whom* the dog is a father to and *what* is the antecedent of "yours"), whereas Socrates uses the similarity of the sounds of words to disguise the fact that "*ou phronein,*" "*ou mega phronein,*" and "*aphrôn*" have different and not quite compatible meanings. Nevertheless, the tone and purpose of the arguments are strikingly similar. In both cases, the questioner asks rapid-fire questions, hardly allowing the answerer to think, and forces the answerer to an embarrassing conclusion.

[*sustellonta*]" (210e). But, if that is all there is to it, it seems to be awfully petty and silly. It is a blatantly eristic trick. Socrates must have deeper purposes in mind.

The clue to understanding Socrates' strategy in this last section—and, to some extent, the discussion as a whole—is in Lysis' response to the argument. He's been told that his parents don't love him, that he has no friends, and, to top it all off, that he's "mindless." But he isn't angry or upset. On the contrary, he reacts mildly, saying only, "Zeus, [...] Socrates, it doesn't seem so to me!" And he doesn't seem to have lost his good spirits, since, as soon as Menexenus comes back, Lysis asks Socrates, "in a very boyish and friendly way [*mala paidikôs kai philikôs*]," to play the same trick on his friend (211a).[238] Socrates tells him to do it himself later: If you paid attention, Socrates says, you'll be able to tell him what I told you. Lysis agrees but still wants Socrates to talk to Menexenus, so he can see Socrates "punish [*kolasêis*]" his "*eristikos*" friend (211c). Lysis' reaction fits a boy who has been beaten in a game, not one who has just been told off by an elder.

It is important to remember, at this point, how Plato introduced Lysis and Menexenus into the dialogue. They like to argue and "dispute [*erizein*]." Socrates and Lysis' characterization of Menexenus as "*eristikos*" confirms this characterization.[239] So here's my interpretation: Knowing about Lysis' eristic predilections and Lysis and Menexenus' practice of arguing about trivial things, Socrates intentionally models his argument (particularly its last movement) on an eristic refutation. Socrates then tells Lysis,

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[238] That Lysis wants Socrates to "say what he just said" to Menexenus shows that he views it as generic refutative mode or set-piece (like a Euthydemian refutation) rather than as a critique directed personally at himself.

[239] Many commentators claim, on the basis of this characterization of Menexenus as *eristikos* that only Menexenus has this quality, and Lysis does not. But I don't think that's right. At the beginning, Menexenus says, *we* dispute and quarrel. And it takes two to play this game, so both parties must be interested and participating. I think the upshot of 211a-c is not that Menexenus is *eristikos* and Lysis is not, but that Menexenus is *better* at it and so usually wins. Lysis wants to see Menexenus lose, for once.

in effect, to try out what he's learned on his friend. Socrates' technique here is very clever, because once the boys start discussing and debating Socrates' arguments, they'll begin to think more carefully about the issues involved, such as freedom, happiness, and love. If all goes well, the boys will take up the challenge that these arguments pose and begin to do philosophy. Socrates' exaggerated eristic argument taps into Lysis' affinity for eristic argument and his competitive friendship with Menexenus in order to get the boys to practice philosophy and to live the examined life.

Despite the light tone, however, Socrates' message, even in this short eristic argument, has a serious side. In particular, Socrates wants Lysis to see that his various assets—noble birth, wealth, good looks, and so on—are not enough. Lysis wants to think big (*mega phronein*)—he wants to be someone who intends and does great things. But, if he does not recognize his limitations and how much he lacks, he risks becoming *megalophrôn* in the bad sense—arrogant, presumptuous—and then he really would be *aphrôn*. He would be guilty of the "most reproachworthy [*eponeidistos*]" ignorance of thinking that he knows what he does not (*Apology* 29b).

3.4 According to my interpretation, then, Socrates is modeling his arguments on the sort of pseudo-philosophical games that Lysis and Menexenus often play, as a way of getting them interested in philosophy. These games, as they are typically played, do not have serious philosophical purposes. When Euthydemus and Dionysodorus "prove" that Ctesippus' father is a dog, or when Lysis and Menexenus "dispute" about who is older, better-looking, or more nobly born, they are not trying to find answers about the important

matters in life. They are trying to outdo each other, to build themselves up by putting the other down.[240]

We might therefore ask: Is Socrates really helping the boys by doing this? How do these *games* lead to philosophy? And if Socrates has some points to make about wisdom and happiness, why does he not give clearer (and, perhaps, more logically sound) arguments? If Lysis really believes that the argument is an eristic trick, he might not take it seriously, as one needs to do in order to discern the hidden philosophical points and puzzles that I've discussed.

I think that I can respond to this objection. First, it is important to recognize that, as in other dialogues, Socrates' range of available tools is limited by the capacities and inclinations of his interlocutors. Not only must he use examples and arguments that his partners can understand; he must also tailor his approach to match the partners' pre-existing motivations. That is, he has to recognize and engage with *his partner's* loves and values. Socrates' discussion with Lysis, therefore, keys on to the boy's central motivations—his relationship with his parents, his friendship with Menexenus, and his fondness for eristic argument—and seeks to turn them to philosophy. Perhaps, then, simpler arguments, such as Socrates' core argument with Clinias (see Chapter 2, §§ 2.1, 4.2), would not have the same attraction for Lysis. In other words, getting Lysis interested through his attraction to eristic may, paradoxically, be the best way to get him to take the argument seriously.

Of course, this strategy will work only if Lysis comes to see more in the argument than just an eristic trick. Accordingly, Socrates' argument, both in its subject matter and in

[240] Having lived through it myself, I know that it is a paradox of friendship among teenage boys that they typically express their friendship with each other by putting each other down.

its content, encourages philosophical thought in a way that eristic arguments do not. Eristic arguments such as those used by the sophist brothers are employed in competition, in order to get the better of an opponent. It is a zero sum game: I win, you lose. And once the eristic argument is done, the competitors don't think about it again, except perhaps to see how they themselves might use similar arguments on others.[241] Socrates' argument, on the other hand, addresses a topic that, as I said before, Lysis cannot set aside once the refutation is done. Both Lysis and Plato's readers cannot help but be struck by what Socrates says and wonder what the answers are. Moreover, in the way that argument is put together, it contains clues about how some progress can be made in understanding the issues. In particular, the argument emphasizes the importance of knowledge: It is knowledge that Lysis' parents want him to have, and knowledge that makes one useful to oneself and others. The importance of knowledge can serve as a starting point in making sense of the issues.

Unlike the sophists, Socrates is not trying to put Lysis down, but to lift him up.[242] Socrates' suggestion that Lysis himself repeat the argument with Menexenus is an important part of this. I know from experience that you understand and appreciate things better when you have to teach and explain them to others. So besides the fact that Menexenus will be exposed to the arguments as well if Lysis succeeds, the exercise will also force Lysis to think through the argument and the concepts it uses more carefully for himself. By

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[241] In the *Euthydemus*, when Euthydemus or Dionysodorus win (or lose) the argument, they press on to the next argument. They do not think about the consequences of their arguments; in fact, they refuse to be held to the Socrates' consistency requirements (287b). Moreover, at the end of the dialogue, when Euthydemus and Dionysodorus achieve their (apparent) final victory, the response is not puzzlement or a promise for further inquiry, but applause (303b). As Socrates puts it, their arguments "completely stitch up men's mouths" (303e): Not only is further inquiry impossible, but also further speech.

[242] As Friedländer (1964) puts it, in pithy fashion: "Lysis loves Socrates. Socrates loves truth. Love tends upward" (98).

going through the arguments again with his friend, he and Menexenus might be able to gain a better understanding of the issues and the problems they raise.

The opaque and puzzling way that Socrates' makes his argument, therefore, has some advantages. For one thing, Socrates may not have a definitive position on the issues being discussed. He may not have positive lessons that he wants Lysis to learn. But, more importantly, the indirect, opaque method of introducing the issues may be only real way to make Lysis into a *philosopher*. He does not want Lysis to parrot what he says. He wants Lysis to think critically about the issues for himself.

Socrates' problem in the *Lysis* is one that he generally faces in speaking with interlocutors. If you know a truth, and you want someone else to believe it, you can tell it to him. He might believe you. But you have to use a different procedure if you want him to *understand* it. You can show him reasons to believe it, but he has to work through and come to understand those reasons for himself. (The discussion that Socrates has with the slave-boy in the *Meno* is an example of this (see esp. 85c-d).) It is still another problem altogether if you are trying not to convey a truth, but rather to show someone the difficulty and importance of a problem to which you do not *know* the solution. In that case, all you can do is to introduce the person to the problem, show him some of the paradoxes that arise, and try to get him to take a serious interest in it.

4. The protreptic elements of the second half

4.1 When Menexenus returns, the direction of the dialogue changes significantly. As Socrates promised Lysis, he first has a conversation with Menexenus, and then he leads both boys through a series of conceptual puzzles about the *philos* or *philia* (friendship). In

fact, the difference between the particularity of Socrates' discussion with Lysis in the first half and the abstractness of his philosophical inquiry in the second is very striking. What does this discussion have to do with what came before? And how do Socrates' activities in the second half fit with the obviously protreptic purposes of his discussion with Lysis?

As a matter of fact, Socrates' efforts to incite Lysis and Menexenus to practice philosophy continue in the second half, despite the difference in tone. Socrates uses some of the same strategies that I outlined from the first half of the dialogue: He engages their motivations, poses puzzles, and challenges them to think through the puzzles more carefully for themselves and with each other. But he is also, I argue, moving on to the second phase of his mission, which I described in the last chapter. Just as in the *Euthydemus*, once Socrates has Lysis and Menexenus' interest, he leads them into a genuine philosophical inquiry, in the process both showing them how an inquiry is done and engaging them as participants in it.

4.2 At first, Socrates focuses his attention on Menexenus. He tells Menexenus that he wants the boy to tell him about friendship (*philia*) (211d-2e). Socrates professes that, since he was young, he has always been "very passionate [*panu erôtikôs*]" about having friends, and that he would rather have a good friend than any of the usual things that people want to possess (211e). As a result, he says, he wants Menexenus to help him. As he says:

> Seeing you two, you and Lysis, I am struck and I consider you happy, because you were able to obtain this possession so swiftly and easily, although you are so young, and because you acquired him as such a friend so swiftly and firmly [*tachu te kai sphodra*], and he you in turn. But I myself am so far from this possession, that I don't know *how* one person becomes friend to another, and in fact it's this very thing that I want you to tell me about, seeing that you have experience. (211e8-212a7)

Since Lysis and Menexenus are "swiftly and firmly" friends, they should have experience of what friendship is.[243] Socrates is appealing to Menexenus in two ways. First, he is appealing to Menexenus' fondness and close relationship with his friend. Lysis and Menexenus' friendship with each other is a central part of each of their lives, almost as important to them as their relationship with their parents. Second, he is stirring up Menexenus' pride. You, though you are so young, know something that I, an old man, do not.[244] Certainly Menexenus thinks he knows. He has no reason to doubt himself, so far.

Socrates begins by asking Menexenus an apparently innocent question: "Which of the two becomes the *philos* of the other, the one who loves the beloved or the one who is the beloved of the lover? Or is there no difference?" (212a8-b2). Menexenus answers confidently that he doesn't think it makes a difference. But Socrates proceeds to show that this is wrong and, in fact, no other answer to the question will work, either. For Socrates can produce a counterexample for any answer that Menexenus finds plausible. The discussion proceeds as follows:

1. Menexenus says that there is no difference who loves, and so long as at least one loves the other, both become the other's *philos* (212b). But, Socrates says, this cannot be right, because sometimes a person loves someone who does not love him back or even hates him. In such a case, it looks like neither is the *philos* of the other, since a person cannot be the *philos* of an enemy or enemy of a *philos* (212c).

2. So now it seem, Socrates continues, that "unless they both love each other, neither is a *philos*" and "nothing is a *philos* of the lover unless it loves him in return" (212d). In other words, perhaps the loving needs to be mutual. But this cannot be right, either, because some people are horse-lovers, quail-lovers,

[243] Compare *Charmides* 159a: "Now it is clear that if temperance is present in you, you have some opinion about it. Because it is necessary, I suppose, that if it really resides in you, it provides a sense of its presence, by means of which you would form an opinion not only that you have it but of what sort it is."
[244] See 223b5, where Socrates calls himself an "old man [*gerôn anêr*]." Socrates probably isn't really *that* old (see Hoerber (1959), 18), but anyone over thirty seems old to a teenager.

etc., and they are not loved in return (212d-e). Moreover, babies are too young to love, but they are *philoi* in the highest degree (*philtata*) to their parents (213a).

3. So maybe the *philos* is not the lover, but the loved. But, once again, if this were the case, some would be loved by their enemies or hated by their friends. This is impossible (213b).

Mutual affection cannot be necessary for '*philos*' to be correctly applied, because, in many cases, '*philos*' is used even when the love *cannot* be returned (#2 above). But neither does it suffice for one party to love the other, because then it would be possible for people to be *philoi* to enemies and enemies to their *philoi*, which is absurd (#1 and #3). Socrates asks, "Are there any others besides these of whom we can say that they become each other's friends?" Menexenus is stumped: "By Zeus, [...] Socrates, I myself am completely at a loss [*ou panu euporô egôge*]" (213c7-9).

When the conversation begins, Menexenus thinks he knows the answer. But Socrates quickly undermines his confidence. Moreover, he brings about this result by means of an argument that *looks* rather eristic. He is able to get Menexenus into trouble by exploiting the systematic ambiguity of the word *philos*.[245] In some uses of the word, mutuality seems necessary—e.g. in the kind of friendship that Lysis and Menexenus have with each other. But in other uses, as in "horse-lover [*philippus*]," it is not. Indeed, Socrates' argument here bears some similarities to arguments used by Euthydemus and

[245] Grote represents a certain way of interpreting this passage when he says, "The debate in the Lysis is partly verbal: *i.e.*, respecting the word *philos*, whether it means the person loving, or the person loved, or whether it shall be confined to those cases in which the love is reciprocal, and then applied to both. Herein the question is about the meaning of words—a word and nothing more" (188). I do not want to say, however, that the *only* question in this passage is about the meaning of words. I think (though I cannot here argue) that some important philosophical points are also being made. See Penner and Rowe, 45-61, for one interpretation of what these points might be.

Dionysodorus.[246] Like the sophists, Socrates gives his answerer a set range of answers from which he must choose. But, in both cases, the answerer has no choice that will succeed; just like the sophist brothers, Socrates is ready to "refute" Menexenus no matter what he says (see *Euthydemus* 275e). Socrates guides the whole course of the discussion, after Menexenus' first choice, and he knows that it's going to hit a dead end. But he leads Menexenus to the dead end anyway.

One purpose of this strategy is to shake Menexenus' confidence. But perhaps another purpose, and a reason that Socrates gives his refutation this semi-eristic form, is that he wants to appeal to Menexenus' fondness for eristic arguments, in the same way as he did with Lysis earlier. Here, Menexenus might think to himself, is a master of refutation, from whom I might be able to learn some things, if I pay attention.[247]

Socrates' argument baffles Menexenus. But Lysis apparently sees something that Menexenus does not. When Socrates wonders whether they might have been going about the inquiry in the wrong way, Lysis responds, "*I* certainly think so, Socrates" (213d1). This is significant for two reasons. For one thing, it shows that Socrates has had some success with Lysis. Not only is he "paying close attention [*to sphodra prosechein ton noun*]" to the discussion, but he has also developed enough "*philosophia*" to see that Socrates' verbal maneuvers will not help them answer the original question, how people become *philoi*

[246] It is true that many of the sophist brothers' arguments do not exploit ambiguity, but rather semantic incompleteness. But some of them do exploit ambiguity—e.g., in the initial refutation of Clinias, which exploits different senses of "*manthanein*" (277e-8a). See Sprague (1962): "The sophists are clearly using not only the fallacy of equivocation but also another fallacy closely connected with it, the one known traditionally as *a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*. [...] The two fallacies in combination give the sophists a very effective instrument for refutation of the unwary" (6).

[247] Both Teloh and Scott claim that Socrates deals very differently with Menexenus than with Lysis; they argue that Socrates deals with Menexenus eristically in order to humble the boy and shake him from his confidence in his eristic abilities. But I do not see that Socrates treats the two boys much differently. Both arguments have some eristic elements, but both also advance our philosophical understanding in certain ways.

(213d4-5, 7).[248] Moreover, Lysis' response reveals that Lysis' original desire to see his friend humbled has been overcome by his genuine interest in the problem at hand. This is why Socrates is pleased with the boy's *philosophia* (213d7). Lysis is not only interested in the discussion, but also interested for the right reasons.

Lysis' aptitude and Socrates' praise, however, are likely to have quite a different effect on Menexenus. Menexenus has just been refuted, and now his friend, whom he usually *beats* in arguments, earns the praise. We can imagine Menexenus' competitive juices flowing, and that, as a result, he'll try even harder to match up. Because of his desire to measure up to Lysis and prove himself after being stumped, he'll come to share Lysis' genuine interest in the issue. So even though Socrates gives Menexenus no explicit argument about the necessity of wisdom for happiness, he manages to motivate Menexenus anyway, by appealing to Menexenus' pride and his competitive feelings toward his friend.

4.3 When the substantive discussion of the *philos* or *philia* begins at 213e, both boys' interest has been engaged in the discussion. They want to discover the truth about friendship. Like Clinias after Socrates' first discussion with him in the *Euthydemus*, each boy has begun to see that he is ignorant, and each wants to gain wisdom. But, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, it is only of limited help to convince a person that they

[248] Penner and Rowe ask of this exclamation, "How is it that Lysis thinks Socrates and Menexenus have been going wrong?" It must be, they say, something that Lysis knows but Menexenus does not. But the main thing that Lysis has learned that Menexenus has not is "about the importance, in the context of *philia*, of knowledge." Lysis thinks to himself, "Shouldn't knowledge be in and around here somewhere?" (62-3). This interpretation has some attraction. But I am not sure how "knowledge" *can* be an answer to the question with which Socrates' began. It seems more plausible that Lysis sees that the original question itself was ill-formed, and that a different kind of question is needed (perhaps the sort of question where "knowledge" can figure into the answer). Thus Socrates' diagnosis: "If we had been looking into the matter correctly, we would not then have wandered so much" (213d2-3).

need to pursue wisdom (or anything else, for that matter) (see § 5.1). Early on, I learned that I needed to maintain and improve my credit rating. But, then, what am I supposed to do? If I hadn't learned some concrete things to do in order to improve my credit rating, I would have forgotten about it and probably have done the wrong things. So also in this case. Lysis believes he needs to become wise in order to get what he desires. Menexenus has been shown that he does not understand friendship as firmly as he had believed. But what are they to do about it? Socrates must now fix their interest and give it a direction.

The philosophical inquiry of the second half, abstract and confusing though it might be, serves this purpose.[249] Granted, Lysis and Menexenus are not very active participants in the investigation.[250] Clinias seems to pick up on how philosophy is done, and he eventually takes the lead in the investigation. The boys here do not appear to have any such insight. If anything, the evidence indicates that they do not even understand some of Socrates' most important points.[251] For example, near the end of the dialogue, when Socrates says, "It is necessary [...] for the genuine lover, one who's not pretending, to be loved by his beloved," Lysis and Menexenus are reluctant to answer and "barely somehow nodded assent," while Hippothales beams with pleasure (221e-222b). Apparently they are worried that by agreeing to this, they are agreeing that they should love smarmy flatterers like Hippothales; certainly this is how Hippothales takes it. But if they had understood the argument, they would have suspected that this was not a conclusion they needed to be reluctant about, since it wouldn't be lovers like Hippothales whom they would have to love

[249] As much as I would like to, I cannot say much specifically about this inquiry. For a thorough and detailed discussion of this passage, see Penner and Rowe (2005).
[250] Vlastos (1994) is unimpressed with Lysis and Menexenus as interlocutors: "When Socrates proposes a thesis the amiable teenagers (whose strong point is good manners and good looks, not brains) go along" (31).
[251] See Penner and Rowe, 178-9.

back. Then, when Socrates asks them whether "the good belongs to everyone" or "the bad belongs to the bad, to the good the good, and to the neither good nor bad the neither good nor bad," they make the wrong choice and pick the latter (222c). But Socrates had just gotten done telling them that what belongs (*to oikeion*) has to be different from what is alike (*to homoion*) (222b-c).

Socrates' investigation of *philia*, therefore, is probably too advanced for Lysis and Menexenus to follow. (After all, we still have trouble with it now.) Nevertheless, it provides a concrete example of philosophy in action. Socrates is introducing the boys to some interesting and difficult philosophical problems, problems that they care about. The entry point for the investigation is a question about how one person becomes friends to another (212a5-6). Socrates sees that Lysis and Menexenus are friends, and he asks Menexenus to explain to him how friendship happens. This is something they think they understand, which they recognize as an important part of their lives. But it soon becomes clear that mutual human friendship is only a special case of the more pervasive phenomenon that Socrates is investigating.[252] Socrates appears to be looking for nothing less than a general account of desire or attraction. The topics broached are central to

[252] The first clue that Socrates has something larger in mind than human friendship comes in his exchange with Menexenus, when he uses horse-lovers, quail-lovers, dog-lovers, wine-lovers, and wisdom-lovers ("*philosophoi*") as examples of *philoi* (212d). Then, with both of the first two accounts of *philia* that they consider, Socrates begins with examples of human relationships, using masculine nouns for key terms. (Homer, in the *Odyssey*, says, "God always leads like [*ton homoion*] to like [*ton homoion*]" (214a). So also Hesiod claims, "Potter is angry with potter, poet with poet, / And beggar with beggar" (215c). Socrates understands this to mean that people are *philoi* to those who are opposite to them (215d).) But, in both cases, he quickly relates the theory he derives from the poet to theories from "those who discuss and write about nature and the whole" (214b3-4), and here the key nouns are neuter ("*to homoion*" (214b4-5); "*to enantion*" (215e)). With Socrates' later accounts, it is not even clear how the accounts in question apply to human friendship. If "only what is neither good nor bad is *philon* to the good, and only the good" (217a), and humans are neither good nor bad (see 215a-b, 218a-c), it is hard to see how one human could be *philos* to another.

human life, and, as such, ones that no one, neither Lysis nor Menexenus nor Plato's readers, can lightly set aside.

In the process, Socrates also introduces the boys to some ways of addressing the problems he poses. First, he shows them how to use the "ancestral voices of human wisdom" to get ideas, when he derives his first two accounts from Homer and Hesiod (214a). (Notice, of course, that the ancestral voices of human wisdom turn out to be way off the mark.) He then shows them how to put these proposals to the test. In some cases, Socrates shows that the proposed accounts have unacceptable consequences (for example: if the like [*ho oikeios*] were necessarily *philos* to the like, the wicked would be *philoi*; but obviously they cannot be (214b-c)). In other cases, he argues that the proposal in question cannot sufficiently explain the relation that needs to be explained (likeness cannot explain *philia*, because insofar as the two relata are alike, they cannot benefit each other (214e-215a)). He also shows them how to learn from the failures of previous accounts, in order to develop better answers to the problems (Socrates' best attempt to answer the problem, first introduced at 217a, develops out of the failed attempts to derive answers from the poets). Throughout the investigation, Socrates repeatedly calls attention to the way that the investigation is being conducted.[253] He wants the boys to notice and learn how a philosophical investigation is done.

4.4 Despite all of this, however, the dialogue ends in an *aporia*. No answer has proven satisfactory. What is the significance of this *aporia*, from an educational standpoint?

[253] For example, see 213d: "Do you think, Menexenus, [...] that we may have been going about our inquiry in entirely the wrong way?" Then, at 215c: "Now, Lysis, consider how we have been knocked off course." Then, when Socrates proposes his account, at 217a, "Well, then, boys, are we on the right track with our present statement?"

There are two ways to respond to *aporiai* of this sort. One response is to suppose that the *aporia* is insoluble, the question unanswerable. The resources for solving are exhausted; there is no way out of the difficulty. Both the skeptic and the Euthydemian sophist seek this result, for different reasons. The skeptic wants his interlocutor to suspend belief. A sophist like Euthydemus wants his interlocutor to admit defeat and to see that no matter what he says, he cannot escape the sophist's web. Neither has the intention, in raising the *aporia*, of promoting further study and progress.

The other response is to see the *aporia* not as the end of discussion, the closing of the possibility of further inquiry, but as a challenge that needs to be resolved. Let's call this a *constructive aporia*. With constructive *aporiai*, the interlocutor is meant to appreciate the difficulties that attend the problem, and, when he works further on the problem, to see that he needs to take the arguments that led to the *aporia* into account. But he should not stop with *aporia* and give up. Instead, the *aporia* in this kind of case serves as an invitation to further philosophy.[254]

Aristotle used *aporiai* in a similar way. In Book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains the method of inquiry that he will use to investigate *enkrateia* and *akrasia*:

> As in the other cases, we must set out the appearances, and first go through the puzzles [*diaporêsantas*]. In this way we must prove the common beliefs [*ta endoxa*] about these ways of being affected—ideally, all the common beliefs, but if not all, then most of them, and the most important. (1145b3-6)

[254] Remember Socrates' comments about misologues in the *Phaedo*. The fact that the arguments you've met so far have proven bad does not mean that you should give up.

"Going through the puzzles" ("*diaporêsantas*") is not the end of Aristotle's inquiry, but the beginning.[255] Once you've gone through them, you need to try to find a way of resolving them and making progress to finding answers, as Aristotle demonstrates.

How does Socrates mean for the *aporia* of their discussion in the *Lysis* to be taken? At the end, he tells Lysis and Menexenus,

> So what can we still do with our argument? Or is it clear that there is nothing left? I do ask, like the able speakers of the law courts, that you think over everything that has been said. If neither the loved nor the loving, nor the like nor the unlike, not the good, nor the belonging, nor any of the others we have gone though—well, there have been so many *I* certainly don't remember them all any more, but if none of these is a *philos*, then I have nothing left to say. (222e)

Socrates admits that he has reached *aporia*—he has nothing left to do or to say. But notice that Socrates does not urge the boys to leave it at that. Instead, he tells them, like a law court speaker, to continue thinking about what has been said. He summarizes the arguments that have been made, to solidify them in the boys' minds. If the boys take his advice, they will keep working with the conceptual and argumentative tools that Socrates has given them. Perhaps they will talk to each other about the encounter. Perhaps they will talk to their other friends or even Socrates again on a later occasion. (We know, at least, that Menexenus does, since he becomes one of Socrates' followers.)

Of course, the real audience for the discussion is not Lysis and Menexenus or anyone else in the dialogue, but the readers for whom Plato wrote the dialogue. Thus the challenge that Socrates poses Lysis and Menexenus is directed no less at the readers.

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[255] I don't think it's too far-fetched to imagine that Aristotle learned this method from Plato. One difference is that Aristotle seeks to preserve the *endoxa* and Plato does not.

Near the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that Plato, unlike Socrates, cannot *see* his audience. He cannot see their loves and interests and shape his approach and his arguments to match, as he shows Socrates doing so deftly. But he can know this much about his readers: First, he knows that they are human and so are liable to share his curiosity about what it is to be human and about the structure of human motivation. And second, from the fact that they are reading the *Lysis* in the first place, he can infer that they are the sort who enjoy thinking about and trying to solve puzzles. The *Lysis* not one of Plato's most accessible dialogues. The people attracted to it are the very ones whom Plato would find most capable of working with it in the way necessary.

4.5 My view, then, is that Plato is posing constructive *aporiai* in the *Lysis*, but *aporiai* to which he does not have solutions in mind. Nevertheless, throughout the *Lysis*, the one thing that hovers just beyond the edge of the discussion is the undeniable fact of human friendship. An adequate account of *philia* must explain the data, and in this dialogue Plato sets the data firmly into the dialogue's dramatic action: The friendships between Ctesippus and Hippothales, Lysis and Menexenus, and, at the end, Socrates, Lysis, and Menexenus. It is no accident that Socrates ends the dialogue by telling the boys, "These people here will go away saying that we are friends of one another—for I count myself in with you" (223b). Socrates does not need a defensible account of *philia* to be able to recognize lovers and the objects of their love; nor does he need such an account to have friends. These examples of human friendship and love serve as base cases against which all accounts of friendship must ultimately be judged. It is making sense of *these* friendships—in particular, the incipient

philosophical friendship that Socrates has begun with Lysis and Menexenus—that is Plato's overall challenge to his reader.

5. Conclusion: Philosophical friendship

5.1 Whatever else we learn from Socrates' investigation of *philia* in the second half of the dialogue, one point is clear: Human *philia* arises because humans, unlike gods, have needs. We are not self-sufficient, and that is why we value and love others. This theme runs throughout the *Lysis*, but it comes out most clearly at 215a1-3, when Socrates is attacking the suggestion that those who are alike (*homoioi*) are *philoi* to each other:

> "How could such things [i.e., the alike] be prized [*agapêtheiê*] by each other if they are of no assistance [*epikourian*] to each other? Is there any way?"
> "There isn't."
> "But if something were not prized, how could it be *philon*?"
> "There's no way."

This passage gives an argument for one of the guiding ideas of the dialogue:

1. x loves (*philei*) or is *philon* to y only if x prizes (*agapai*) y.
2. But x prizes y only if y benefits or provides assistance (*epikouria* or *ôphelia*) to x.
3. Therefore, x loves or is *philon* to y only if y benefits or provides assistance to x.[256]

In other words, love, attraction, or friendship occurs for humans only because we need things—assistance, benefit, and companionship. On the other hand, Socrates continues, a being without *needs*, who is "good" and so self-sufficient, does not prize or value ("*peri pollou poieisthai,*" 215b7) anything. As a result, nothing is *philon* to such a being (215a-b). Human beings, however, are not "good" in this sense. We are, as Socrates puts it, "neither

[256] Similar reasoning occurs at 210c-d (one person does not love another unless he is useful); 215b (a good person is self-sufficient, does not need anything, and thus cannot prize or love anyone); 217a-218c (the neither good nor bad is *philon* to the good because the good is beneficial); and 221d-e (desire is the cause of *philia*, and a thing desires that in which it is deficient).

good nor bad" (217a; also 218a-b, 219a), and so we *do* love and desire things, including, of course, other people.

According to Socrates, philosophy is one manifestation of our human desire for what we lack. As Socrates explains to Lysis and Menexenus:

> We may infer that those who are already wise no longer love wisdom, whether they are gods or men. Nor do those love it who are so ignorant that they are bad, for no bad or stupid man loves wisdom. There remain only those who have this bad thing, ignorance, but have not yet been made ignorant and stupid by it. They are conscious of knowing what they don't know. (218a-b)

A being that already has wisdom does not need or love it. But neither does the person who fails to recognize his deficiency. Only a person who is not ignorant but recognizes his ignorance, like Socrates, becomes a lover of wisdom, a philosopher. Diotima's account of the philosopher in the *Symposium* echoes this view (204a). Diotima contends, against Agathon, that the lover is not the one who already has beauty and goodness. Rather, he is the one who lacks them but is aware of his deficiency. So also the philosopher is the one who realizes that he needs wisdom and thus desires to attain it.

So how do we get what we need? As Plato recognizes, one of the main things that humans require to meet our needs and to attain the good is the society of other human beings. That is, we *need* human friends (*philoi*, more generally). Socrates does not make this point explicitly in the *Lysis*. But, in other dialogues, Socrates takes this idea as a sort of axiom of his political thought. At *Republic* 2.369b, when Socrates and his interlocutors are laying the foundations of their ideal *polis*, Socrates says to Adiemantus, "I think a *polis* comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient, but we all need many things. Do you

think a *polis* is founded on any other principle?"[257] Cities arise because of those needs, because we need others to take a share of the work of staying alive and to provide for a secure life. The ideal city of the *Republic* is meant to provide the ideal conditions for meeting those needs.

Of course, according to Plato, the greatest and most important good is not security or luxury, but wisdom. As Socrates argues in the *Euthydemus*, wisdom is the good that is necessary to make other goods useful and beneficial for us. But the difficult question (as we've seen) is, how do we obtain wisdom? I think that Plato would agree that for human beings, who do not have wisdom and cannot attain even a small degree of it without great trouble, companionship and philosophical discussion with other people—what we might call philosophical friendship—is a necessary condition for them to attain any wisdom. Given our limitations, we *must* search for wisdom together. We just can't do it alone.

Not even Socrates can obtain wisdom alone. There are many passages that I could cite as evidence, but three in particular stand out. The first comes from the *Crito*. Crito has come to the prison to convince his old friend to break out with him and escape to another city. Having heard Crito's plan, Socrates tells him,

> Let us examine the question together, my dear friend, and if you can make any objection while I am speaking, make it and I will listen to you, but if you have no objection to make, my dear Crito, then stop now from saying the same thing so often [...] I think it important to persuade you before I act, and not to act against your wishes. (48e-9a)

[257] See also *Protagoras* 322a-d; *Charmides* 171d-172a; *Alcibiades* 127b-c. In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras argues (and Socrates does not disagree) that *poleis* arise and are necessary because solitary humans are easily wiped out by other animals, who are better equipped to survive. In the latter two passages, Socrates expresses the idea that *poleis* are well and beneficially governed when everyone does the work in which he is most qualified. This idea is similar to the one Socrates develops in the *Rep.* 2 (cited above), where citizens must specialize and help each other in order to survive.

Socrates faces a serious ethical decision, and he is deliberating about what to do.[258] He charges Crito (whom he addresses twice as his "*philos*") with an important role. Crito is supposed to listen sincerely to Socrates' argument and voice his objections. Socrates knows that he can make mistakes, and so he is willing to rethink his position if his friend thinks that he is wrong. He says that he will not act against Crito's wishes.

It is important that the person playing this role is a friend who cares deeply about Socrates. If he did not care, he would not do his best to ensure that Socrates makes the right choice. This is the point that Socrates makes in my second passage, from the *Gorgias*. Callicles has just finished chastising Socrates for his way of life, and Socrates tells him:

> I well know that if you concur with what my soul believes, then that is the very truth. I realize that the person who intends to put a soul to an adequate test to see whether it lives rightly or not must have three qualities, all of which you have: knowledge, good will, and frankness. (486e-7a)

A person without knowledge will not see when Socrates has gone wrong; a person without frankness will not have the nerve to tell him. And, perhaps most importantly, a person without good will, who is not a friend, will not care enough to make the effort, to try to help his friend by preventing him from believing falsely about how to live. As Socrates says, "You are my friend, as you yourself say, too. So, our mutual agreement will really lay hold of the truth in the end" (487e).[259]

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[258] According to Teloh (1986), the *Crito* provides "the only explicit example of the knowledge of good and evil in application to a complex situation. [...] The *Crito* shows Socrates taking the previous results of dialectic, and applying them to the problem at issue" (117). Teloh is right that Socrates applying the results of dialectic to a concrete problem, but I think it is too strong to say that this is "*knowledge* of good and evil in action." Socrates does not suppose that he has knowledge. That is why he and Crito need to consider the problem together, to find the course of action that *seems* best.

[259] Of course, Callicles eventually proves to have none of these qualities. He does not seem to know what the good life is, since he cannot defend his view. He abuses his supposed "friend" Socrates and eventually

My third passage comes from the *Phaedo*. Socrates and his friends are discussing death and the soul. At first, when Socrates argues that death is not fearful, Cebes and Simmias are reluctant to express reservations about his argument (84c). But Socrates chastises them, saying,

> If you will take my advice, you will give but little thought to Socrates but much more to the truth. If you think that what I say is true, agree with me; if not, oppose it with every argument and take care that in my eagerness I do not deceive myself and you and, like a bee, leave my sting in you when I go. (91c)

The point of this passage is that even Socrates makes mistakes, and he needs others to serve as a check on his fallible human tendencies. In the dialogues (particularly the early dialogues), Socrates does not meet an interlocutor who can really put his ideas to the test in the way he would like.[260] But it is clear from these passages that this is what he wants.

5.2 When Socrates opens his conversation with Menexenus about *philia*, he says:

> Ever since I was a boy there's a certain possession I've really desired, just as other men want other things. For some one person wants to possess horses, another dogs, another wealth, another honor. But I am lukewarm about those things, but about the acquisition of friends I am very passionate [*panu erôtikôs*], and I would rather have a good friend than the best quail or gamecock known to men; and, yes, by Zeus, more than any horse or dog. I think, by the Dog, that I would sooner possess a companion [*hetairon*] than the gold of Darius, sooner than Darius himself—in this way I am a sort of lover of friends and companions [*philetairos*]. (211d7-e8)

This is quite a remarkable passage, when you think about it. Other men, Socrates says, love horses, dogs, wealth, or honor over everything else. These loves shape their lives, such that others identify them as "horse-lovers" or "money-lovers." But, according to

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refuses to talk to him. And he seems unwilling to say what he really believes and agrees to Socrates' catamite example only, as he says, "to keep my argument from being inconsistent" (495a).

[260] On this issue, see Nehamas (1999), esp. chapter 2.

Socrates, what he is "very passionate" about is getting friends and companions. Socrates is a *philetairos*, and he values friends and companions more than any of the things most other people value.

What are we to make of this passage? Penner and Rowe argue that the "good friend" that Socrates is passionate to possess is the "first friend" (49), which, they argue, is identical to wisdom or knowledge (143-153). On their interpretation of the passage, then, Socrates is merely expressing his love of wisdom, in veiled terms. On some level, they may be right. But Socrates says that he wants *hetairoi*, companions—is wisdom a companion? Lysis and Menexenus surely understand him to be talking about *human* friends and companions, and I think this is what Socrates primarily means. He wants good *human* friends, companions who, as I have been saying, can help him on his quest for wisdom.

In the *Lysis*, we see Socrates in action, seeking to acquire new philosophical friends. We do not know, by the end, whether Socrates has made any long lasting or deep impart on the boys. But, we get to see the great *philetairos* in action, and, in the short term at least, he does have some success. He is able quickly to understand Lysis and his motivations: his attachment to his parents, his competitive friendship with Menexenus, and his vague hopes for a future in which he would be entrusted with power and influence. Socrates engages with those values and motivations and starts to turn them in a more productive and beneficial direction. Perhaps, in the future, Socrates will have two more *hetairoi*, two more companions on his philosophical quest.

Chapter IV:

Transforming Political Ambition in the *Alcibiades* I

0. Introduction

Alcibiades has, in many ways, a unique place in the Socratic narrative. According to Socrates, Alcibiades is, along with philosophy, one of his two great loves (*Gorgias* 481d; see also *Protagoras* 309a, *Symposium* 213d). But Alcibiades also represents the philosopher's most notable failure, because despite Socrates' love for him, Alcibiades went spectacularly wrong. The great potential that Socrates recognized, because of which he loved the young man, went unfulfilled.[261] And so anyone reflecting on Socrates' story must wonder what happened.[262] Why couldn't Socrates do more for Alcibiades? Why did he fail to engage the young man in a philosophical friendship that might have saved him?

The *Alcibiades I* dramatizes Socrates' attempt to win Alcibiades for philosophy.[263] In this dialogue, Socrates confronts the talented yet overconfident and complacent young

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[261] Alcibiades' potential for greatness is, as we'll see, what attracts Socrates to him in the first place. Socrates says, "For my part, Alcibiades, if I saw that you were content with the advantages I just mentioned and thought that this was the condition in which you should live out the rest of your life, I would have ceased to love you long ago" (104e6-8). Socrates loves Alcibiades because Alcibiades is not satisfied with an ordinary life. His restless energy and dissatisfaction with the mundane makes him a potential philosopher. (See *Symp.* 210a ff.; *Republic* 5.476b ff.; *Rep.* 6.486a, 491b ff.; *Phaedrus* 252e). Someone without this kind of "vigorous" nature (*Rep.* 491d), on the other hand, won't strive to understand reality. See Gribble (1999) pp. 217-21, O'Connor (1998).

[262] This puzzle explains why so many ancient writers of Socratic dialogues wrote works entitled *Alcibiades*, including Euclides, Phaedo of Elis, Antisthenes, and Aeschines of Sphettus. For references, see Gribble, 214.

[263] Although the question of the authenticity of the *Alcibiades I* remains unsettled, I do not intend to address it directly here. As far as I can see, while those who question the dialogue's authenticity have raised some issues with the dialogue that need to be taken seriously—for recent examples, see Gribble and Smith (2004)—none

man for the first time and seeks to turn Alcibiades' arrogant ambitions toward a nobler and higher purpose. Through the course of the encounter, Socrates employs a wide variety of strategies to motivate Alcibiades. These strategies include both negative and positive elements. That is, Socrates not only seeks to shame and humble the young man for his lack of knowledge and the pettiness of his plans; he also tries to draw out and nurture Alcibiades' more noble aspirations and his deep desire for true greatness. The brilliance of Socrates' strategy is that, even as he shames Alcibiades, pushing him away from his former conceits, he also offers Alcibiades glimpses of a greater purpose that he could pursue, if only he should decide to take care (*epimeleia*) for himself and join Socrates in the philosophical quest. The dialogue reaches its climax with a powerful image (at 130d ff.), suggestive if unclear, about how that might be done.

In this chapter, I analyze Socrates' efforts with Alcibiades in this dialogue, paying special attention to how Socrates engages Alcibiades' motivations in order to draw him, in the last section of the dialogue, into a cooperative investigation (a "*koinê boulê*," Socrates calls it) of the question, how are we to take *epimeleia* for ourselves? In so doing, I note some continuities with what, in previous chapters, we've seen Socrates doing. The general pattern I've traced in the last two chapters—a humbling argument the conclusion of which is that we need wisdom, followed by an inconclusive but instructive cooperative investigation—

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of their arguments have been conclusive. See Denyer (2001), 14-26, and Scott (2000), 82n1, for accounts of the debate that are sympathetic to the dialogue's authenticity. On the whole, I follow the approach of Annas (1985): "The best way to begin is, I think, to assume, heuristically, that the *Alcibiades* [is] by Plato, and see what that achieves. If it proves illuminating about themes in the Platonic corpus [...] then that is reason for taking seriously Plato's authorship" (115). In this case, I try to show that a close study of the dialogue sheds light on the themes I have been exploring in this dissertation. But I would add that even if the dialogue is not authentic, it is at least the work of near contemporary, almost certainly Plato's student or close associate, who was familiar with Plato's work and thought and writing about a topic, Socratic protreptic, that Plato himself had treated similarly in other dialogues. Thus, I believe that we can safely assume that the ideas and themes advanced in the dialogue, if not Plato's, at least reflect thinking on these issues in Plato's Academy.

is followed in the *Alcibiades*. But the *Alcibiades* also includes some ideas—in particular, the claims that *self*-knowledge (equivalent to *sôphrosunê*) is necessary for personal and political success, and that we gain self-knowledge by somehow "looking into" another's soul—that we have not seen in the other dialogues. In the final sections of this chapter, I address the questions: How much sense we can make of these ideas? And what do they tell us about the nature and value of the philosophical life?

1. Socrates' enticement and humbling

1.1 As the *Alcibiades* opens, Socrates makes it clear that Alcibiades has a deep confidence in himself and his own abilities. Alcibiades is young—as we find out later, he is "not quite twenty yet" (123d6-7). Nevertheless, he believes that he doesn't need anything from anyone else in order to achieve his goals. He has rejected all suitors, convinced that they have nothing to offer him (103b). According to Socrates, he plans to go into a public career relying only on his looks, noble birth, wealth, and natural intelligence (104a-c; 123e).

Socrates wants to convince the young man that this plan will not work, that "it is impossible to accomplish any of these ideas of yours without me" (105d2-3). He seeks to show Alcibiades that he needs to take *epimeleia* for himself and practice philosophy, by demonstrating how far Alcibiades' current qualifications and abilities fall short of what's required to achieve his ambitions. Socrates does this in two ways. First, as would expect, he casts doubt on Alcibiades' current abilities. This is what I called the *negative* side of Socrates' strategy: He tries to deflate Alcibiades' self-confidence, by showing him that, in all the ways that matter, he is ignorant, unprepared, and so unworthy of being taken seriously as a political advisor and leader. But the *positive* side of Socrates' strategy is, I

would argue, just as important. Socrates also tries to get Alcibiades to appreciate the gap between where he is and where he needs to be by raising his standards and expectations about what he wants to accomplish. Before he meets Socrates, Alcibiades seems to be planning to pursue a typical Athenian political career (see, e.g., 119b-e, § 2.1 below). Throughout the dialogue, Socrates tries, in various ways, to get Alcibiades to recognize a higher and more worthy purpose that he might pursue.

This positive side of Socrates' strategy is evident in the provocative way in which he opens the conversation. According to Socrates, Alcibiades has great ambitions—so great, in fact, that only he, Socrates, has grasped their true extent (105a). He explains,

> Suppose one of the gods asked you, "Alcibiades, would you rather live with what you now have, or would you rather die on the spot if you weren't permitted to acquire anything greater?" I think you'd choose to die. [...] You think you would not be willing to live [...] unless you fill more or less all of humanity with your name and power [*dunamis*] (105a3-c5).

This approach gets Alcibiades' attention. As we know, Alcibiades is not usually inclined to listen to suitors, particularly when, like Socrates, they have uncomplimentary things to say about him. Socrates therefore must get Alcibiades to listen to him by engaging with what he values, and Alcibiades values nothing so much as political power and influence.

But notice that, in this description, Socrates gives Alcibiades' ambitions a form and substance of which Alcibiades himself does not seem to have been aware.[264] After all, has Alcibiades, at twenty years of age, really thought consciously that he would rather *die* than fail to achieve power over the known world? Alcibiades is rather surprised by Socrates' speech: "Really, Socrates, now you seem much more bizarre [*atopôteros*] to me, since you

[264] On the topic of how Socrates plays upon Alcibiades' ambitions (perhaps dangerously), see O'Connor (1998) and Scott (2000), ch. 2, esp. p. 81.

started to talk, than when you followed me in silence" (106a3-4). Indeed, he is reluctant to agree that Socrates has described his ambitions correctly (106a-c). That is not to say that Alcibiades would not, on reflection, endorse Socrates' description of his plans. But, so far at least, he hasn't thought about it in those terms.

Socrates is beginning what I take to be his main undertaking in this dialogue: to transform Alcibiades' ambition, to change the young man's understanding of the greatness he wants to achieve. Indeed, what Socrates is trying to do is not to rid Alcibiades of his ambitions, but rather to get him to see more clearly what his true ambitions *are*.

1.2 Before Socrates can really transform Alcibiades' ambitions, however, he first has to unsettle the young man's deep self-confidence. This is what I'm calling the negative side of Socrates' strategy: Once he has Alcibiades' attention, he initiates a series of sharp attacks on Alcibiades' conceits. Alcibiades believes that, because of his native qualities, he is both capable and worthy of being among the greatest and most influential people in the known world (105b). His many years of easy success have led him to believe that he does not need anyone or anything else. Socrates aims to undermine his confidence, and his primary tool is shame. He seeks to shame Alcibiades for presuming to give advice to the Athenian people without having anything worthwhile to offer them.

Socrates imagines the following scenario. Alcibiades plans, in the near future, to start a political career and to present himself to Athenians as an advisor. But when you do this, Socrates asks him, on what subject do you plan to offer advice? (106c) A person is worthy of giving advice not because he is good-looking, well-born, or rich (like Alcibiades), but because he knows the subject on which he speaks (106d; 107c). That is why, when the

Athenians want advice on building, divination, or medicine, they ask experts in those fields.[265] So, Socrates asks Alcibiades, "What will the Athenians be intending to discuss when you get up to give them your advice?" (106c5-7). What does *he* have to offer?

In this way, Socrates places Alcibiades imaginatively in front of his peers, the very people whose honor and good opinion he wants so much.[266] Will he have anything to say? Or will he be lost for words, a ridiculous and presumptuous young man worthy of laughter, not honor? Socrates' technique here, then, plays directly on Alcibiades' sense of shame. A public speaker's worst nightmare is being caught in front of an audience with nothing to say. This is the situation Alcibiades will be in, if he can't answer Socrates' questions.

Socrates continues: The only things that Alcibiades knows and is therefore qualified to offer advice about are those subjects that he has either learned from others or worked out for himself (106d). But it seems that the subjects he's learned so far in his life—writing, lyre-playing, and wrestling—are not ones about which the Assembly needs advice (106e-7b). Alcibiades responds that he will advise the Athenians when they are talking "about their own business [*peri tôn heautôn pragmatôn*]" (107c). But what is the city's business? Eventually, Alcibiades specifies: He'll give the Athenians advice when they

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[265] Compare Socrates' argument with Lysis, 209a-10a, Chapter 3, §§ 2.3-2.4. Socrates argues that Lysis' neighbor, the Athenians, and even the Great King of Persia will turn their affairs over to Lysis in those areas where Lysis appears more knowledgeable than anyone else. Socrates takes a slightly different line at *Protagoras* 319b-e. There, he says that the Athenians listen only skilled craftsmen on "matters which they consider technical [*peri ... hôn oiontai en technêi einai*]" (319c7-8), "no matter how good-looking and rich and well-born he might be" (c3-4), but when deliberating "on city management [*peri tôn tês phuseôs dioikêseôs*]" (c8-d1), they allow anyone to speak. If this is a correct description of how the Athenians operate (and it probably is), Socrates is wrong to imply in the *Alc.* that Alcibiades needs to have learned a special skill before he'll be allowed to address the Athenians. But Socrates may not agree with the way the Athenians do things, and so he may think that only qualified people *should* contribute to political decision making.

[266] Socrates later suggests that Alcibiades is, like Callicles in the *Gorgias*, a lover of the people (*dêmos*) (*Alc.* 132a; cf. *Gorg.* 481d).

make decisions about whom to declare war on or make peace with (107d).[267] Socrates presses him to concede, however, that such decisions should be made with a view to what's better. A city should make decisions about war and peace by considering what it is better to do in the circumstances (107d-8a).

So, how does the city decide what is better in war and peace? As Socrates explains, what is better is what is done correctly, and "what is correct [...] is what happens in accordance with the skill [*kata tên technên*]" (108b6-7). For example, music is better played when played musically (*mousikôs,* d8), in accordance with the skill of music (*mousikê,* d3). The question for Alcibiades, then, is what skill provides the standards of correctness in political affairs. "What," Socrates asks, "do you call this 'better' [*touto to beltion*] in both making war and keeping the peace?" (108d9-e1).

Alcibiades has a hard time answering this question—he twice says he can't do it (108e5; 109a8)—and Socrates takes him to task for it. "Aren't you ashamed [*ouk aischunêi*]," Socrates says, that you claim to understand and to be able to offer advice on this topic, when you cannot answer fundamental questions about it? (109a). Socrates uses variations of the word "shame" (*aischunomai, aischros*) three times in a short paragraph; we can see the imagined Athenian audience shaking their heads disapprovingly. In the end, Socrates practically has to give Alcibiades the answer that he has in mind (109a-b): That what is better when it comes to war and peace is what is more just (109c9-11). That is, a city should wage war on those who are treating it unjustly, make peace with those who act justly. But Alcibiades is not convinced. He says, "Even if someone thought it was

[267] Alcibiades' answer is appropriate considering that one of his greatest political achievements was to convince the Athenians (rightly or wrongly) to make war on Syracuse during the Peloponnesian War. Later in the dialogue, Socrates leads Alcibiades to conceive of the city's business more broadly (124e-7d).

necessary to wage war on people who were treating us justly, he wouldn't admit it" (109c1-3). He firmly agrees only when Socrates says, "So you would *make your arguments* [*tous logous poiêsêi*] in these terms" (c6-7, my emphasis). In other words, Alcibiades thinks that a public speaker has to use the language of justice when *speaking* about war, but he is not sure that the actual decision would be made on this basis, as becomes clear later (at 113d).[268]

1.3 The first topic on which Alcibiades might offer advice to the Athenian Assembly, then, is justice. But, Socrates proceeds to argue, Alcibiades does not know enough about justice to be a good advisor. Socrates' strategy in this passage for showing Alcibiades his ignorance is, as far as I know, unparalleled in Plato's dialogues. In most cases (for example, in the *Euthyphro*), Socrates shows his interlocutor that he is ignorant of a virtue (say, piety) by showing him that he cannot sustain or defend a satisfactory account of what the virtue is. Here, by contrast, Socrates doesn't ask Alcibiades what justice is. Instead, he

[268] Thucydides corroborates Alcibiades' attitude about the role considerations of justice play in decisions about war. Thucydides writes, "I believe that the truest reason for the quarrel [the Peloponnesian War], though least evident in what was said at the time, was the growth of Athenian power, which put fear into the Lacedaemonians and so compelled them into war" (i.23, trans. Woodruff). The topic of justice is one of those things that is "evident in what was said at the time," according to Thucydides. The allies of Sparta want the Spartans to declare war on Athens, citing the supposed injustices committed by Athens (i.68), and arguing that they would not be doing anything unjust in violating the treaty in order to fight back (71). Then, in his clinching speech, the Spartan ephor Sthenelaïdas says, "We've stayed the same, then and now: we will not disregard any injustice to our allies, if we are clearheaded, and we will punish Athens without delay, since there is no delay in our allies' suffering" (86). Thus, in their speeches, the Spartans and their allies talk about the justice. But, according to Thucydides, their *decision* is based not on these considerations, but on their fear of growing Athenian power.

argues that Alcibiades *cannot* know what justice is (he cannot "distinguish between the more just and the less just" (109d3-4)), because he has never *acquired* the knowledge.[269]

Here's how the argument goes: Socrates and Alcibiades agree that a person understands only what he has learned from others or found out through his own investigations (106d).[270] Alcibiades, however, clearly had no specific teacher who taught him justice (109d3-4). Perhaps, Alcibiades suggests, he learned about justice and injustice in some other way. But, if he didn't learn from a teacher, Socrates argues, he would have to have discovered it for himself, which he would have done only if he had thought to investigate the matter. Moreover, he would have investigated it only if he'd believed at some point that he didn't know (109e). But, Socrates says, there never was a time that Alcibiades didn't think that he understood justice (110a). Even when he was a boy, Socrates says, he was often angry at playmates and accused them of cheating and not playing fairly (110b). At that time, he appeared to have no doubt that he understood justice and injustice. But if Alcibiades never believed that he did not understand justice, he would not have bothered to investigate it.

Alcibiades proposes another possibility: Maybe he didn't find it out for himself, but instead learned it "from people in general [*para tôn pollôn*]" (110e1). Socrates is skeptical—people in general (*hoi polloi*), he says, are lousy teachers.[271] They can't even

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[269] The second refutation in the *Alc.* (113d-116e) is closer to what we see in other dialogues, insofar as Socrates seeks to cast doubt on Alcibiades' beliefs (in particular, his belief that the just and advantageous are different; see below).

[270] Compare what Socrates says about the qualifications for giving advice at *Laches* 185d-187b. The question there is how to recognize a person who is "expert in the care of the soul and is capable of caring for it well" (185e). Socrates proposes that they should consider someone an expert and listen to his advice only if either he can point to teachers from which he gained his expertise or he can point to those who have "become good through his influence" (186b). This is the closest parallel that I can think of to Socrates' argument in the *Alc.*

[271] Socrates often disparages the judgment of "*hoi polloi*" in Plato's dialogues. See, for example, *Ap.* 25a-b (only experts are able to improve horses, whereas *hoi polloi* corrupt them); *Crito* 47b-48a (we need to listen

teach trivial subjects like what moves to make in knucklebones. But, more importantly, they often disagree about justice. It is fine to say that people in general are good teachers of Greek. They don't disagree about how to use words, so it is reasonable to think that they know enough about Greek to be able to teach it (111a). But, it is entirely different in the case of justice. People disagree more violently about just and unjust people and actions than anything else. According to Socrates, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are all about disagreements about justice (112a-c). Alcibiades' father died in a battle caused by similar disagreements (112c). But there is no way that a set of people who disagree so deeply about something can understand it, and if the people in general don't know justice, how could they have taught it to Alcibiades? (112d).

Alcibiades therefore has to admit that, if Socrates' argument is right, he doesn't know justice and so is not qualified to offer advice on it. Alcibiades' advantages—wealth, good looks, etc.—do not help in this case. Alcibiades is not happy about the result, however, and he resists accepting it.[272] He thinks Socrates is has tricked him ("From what *you* say [...]" (112d11)), and Socrates must force him to admit that, in answering the questions and agreeing to the conclusions, *he* was really the one saying that he had no

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to the advice of the person who knows, not of *hoi polloi*); and *Laches* 184e ("I think it is by knowledge that one ought to make decisions, if one is to make them well, and not by majority rule").

[272] I can see why Alcibiades would be dissatisfied with the result of the argument. A way of thinking about justice and our knowledge of it that was current in Athens at the time supports Alcibiades' position. I am thinking of the view that is behind Protagoras' great speech in the *Protagoras*. On this view, everyone has a share of justice innately, by a gift of Zeus (*Protagoras* 322c-d). It is reasonable to suppose that our innate sense of right and wrong, which is expressed in emotions like Alcibiades' anger at the cheaters, is a manifestation of that gift. But it is raw and unrefined, and the education that we get from the "people in general" serves to sharpen and reinforce it (*Prt.* 324a ff.). Moreover, like Alcibiades, Protagoras compares the way that *hoi polloi* are teachers of virtue to the way they are teachers of Greek (327e-8a). From this perspective, Alcibiades' account of how he knows justice is reasonable, and Socrates' insistence that he has to learn it in the same way that one learns to play the lyre seems wrong.

knowledge of justice (112e-3b). When questions are asked and answers given, Socrates insists, it is the *answerer* who makes claims, not the questioner.

Alcibiades has no response this argument. He thinks that he understands justice; indeed, he doesn't think it is very hard to understand. Socrates' argument, however, suggests that there might be something more to know about justice than most people believe, something that one might need to work hard to learn or find out.

1.4 Alcibiades is not too upset by losing this argument, however, because he actually doesn't think he'll be called on to give advice about justice:

> Well, *I* think, Socrates, that Athenians and other Greeks rarely take counsel about whether things are more or less just; for they think these sorts of matters are obvious, and so they leave them aside and look into which of the two courses of action would benefit [*sunoisei*] those doing them. For I think that what's just and what's beneficial [*sumpheronta*] are not the same, but in fact many who have committed great injustices have profited, and still others have not benefited from doing what's just. (113d1-8)

Alcibiades still believes that he understands justice (he still thinks that most people agree that matters of justice are "obvious [*dêlon*]"). The debates in which he really plans to participate will concern what is *beneficial*, not just.

Even so, Socrates replies, Alcibiades would still need to *know* what is beneficial and why (113e). He next argues that Alcibiades doesn't know this, either.[273] He does this by

[273] When Socrates says, "Surely you don't think you know what benefits people, and why, do you?", Alcibiades replies, "What's to stop me, Socrates?" (113e1-4). As with justice, Alcibiades assumes that the beneficial is something he can know. Again, I think he is confident because of the way he understands what's beneficial. If a city's benefit consisted in getting obvious things like power, wealth, and so on (increasing GDP), anyone would know enough at least to get started in politics. The *goal* would be easy to understand, though it might take practical experience to know how to get it. Thus the essence of politics, on this naïve view, would be to convince others to go along with your plan, and, as history shows, Alcibiades was good at this. But Socrates thinks that the question about what benefits people and why is very difficult, and the answers are not at all obvious. As he says in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*, political leaders go wrong when they assume that wealth, imperial influence, walls, and ships will make the city good and happy (*Ap.* 36c-d;

targeting Alcibiades' belief, expressed in the passage quoted above, that the just and beneficial do not always coincide. At first, he asks Alcibiades to take the lead: Convince *me*, he says, that what you say is true (114b). He even offers to let Alcibiades to make a speech on the subject, but Alcibiades refuses (114d).[274] So Socrates undertakes to convince Alcibiades that, in fact, all just things *are* beneficial (114e). If Alcibiades is wrong about this, he must not know what he is talking about.

Socrates argues as follows: Alcibiades agrees that all just things are admirable or noble (*kala*) (115a8). But he does not believe that all admirable things are good, so Socrates gives two sub-arguments that they are. From these two claims, it follows that all just things are good, and, since what is good benefits (116c7-8), it turns out that all just things are beneficial.

Neither of Socrates' two sub-arguments, however, is very good. They are both suggestive, in that they call to mind themes developed more fully in others of Plato's dialogues. But, in both cases, Alcibiades seems to have room to object to moves that Socrates makes and to equivocations on key terms. He does not object, though, because he is (apparently) confused and disoriented by the arguments. Once again, Socrates appears to be using questionable arguments for his protreptic purposes (see Ch. 2, § 4.5; Ch. 3, § 3.1).

In the first sub-argument, Socrates discusses an example of what he and Alcibiades agree most people have in mind when they say that actions can be noble (*kala*) but bad: "Many people are wounded or killed in battle when they rescue companions and relatives;

Gorg. 517b ff.). Instead, they should try to make their citizens better people (*Gorg.* 515d; *Euthyd.* 292c-d; *Alc.* 134b-c; *Rep.* I.342e).

[274] This is unusual, since Socrates ordinarily insists that interlocutors refrain from making speeches and give short answers to his questions or ask him questions (*Prot.* 334d; *Gorg.* 449b-c).

but when they don't rescue, as they should [*deon*], they go away healthy" (115b1-3). In this case, it seems, rescuing is the right and noble thing to do—it is what the person *should* do—but it is bad, because he ends up wounded or dead. Socrates argues, however, that "it's not with respect to the same thing [*kata tauton*] that rescuing friends is both noble and bad" (115c3-4). According to Socrates, the courage of the rescue attempt, on the one hand, and the resulting death, on the other, are two different things, two distinguishable constituents of the action (115c1).[275] But, as Alcibiades enthusiastically agrees, courage, in itself, is a good thing, among the greatest goods (115c-d). Conversely, death, like cowardice, is one of the worst evils. Thus the rescue is *noble* because it does something very good, something courageous (e9-11); but it is bad because does something bad, because it leads to death (e13). But, Socrates continues, "if you call an action bad with respect to the way [*hêi*] it brings about [*apergazetai*] something bad, you should call an action good with respect the way it brings about something good" (115e16-116a1). In other words, when we isolate the noble-making feature of the action—its courageousness—we recognize that it is also good-making. So, as Socrates puts it, "Isn't [an action] also noble in the way that it's good, and shameful in the way that it's bad?" (116a3).[276] Therefore, "nothing noble, to the extent that [*kath' hoson*] it's noble, is bad, nor yet is anything shameful, to the extent that it's shameful, good" (a9-10).

[275] As Socrates puts it, "*ar' oun ouk allo men hê andreia, allo de ho thanatos.*"
[276] "*Ar' oun kai hêi agathon, kalon hêi de kakon, aischron;*" The locution here seems to me to be more specific than "insofar as," which I usually use as a translation for "*kath' hoson*" (see next sentence above). By using "*hêi*," Socrates seems to be emphasizing the *way* that things get to be (are made) noble and good.

This is a pretty subtle argument, and it makes some questionable moves. In his commentary, Denyer raises several objections (145-8).[277] I think the most serious problem, from Alcibiades' perspective, is that Socrates conflates what are for Alcibiades different senses of "good." After all, what does Alcibiades mean when he claims, at 114d, that not all just things benefit? He means that just actions do not always benefit the person (or city) who does them; that is, they are not good *for the doer*. But when Alcibiades agrees that courage is the greatest of goods, he does not mean that courage is good (and thus beneficial) in the same sense. Alcibiades probably thinks that courage is good because either (a) it is a quality that makes someone good and noble as a person, or (b) it benefits other people (e.g., the people rescued), but not because (c) it benefits the person himself. But in order to refute Alcibiades' claim validly, Socrates would need to show (at least) that courage is good for reason (c).

Now, there is some evidence that *Socrates* (or Plato) believes that the three senses of good I've distinguished above are coextensive. That is, he thinks that the qualities that make someone good as a person are the virtues of the soul; but that virtues are both good for the person who has them,[278] and beneficial to others.[279] Moreover, Alcibiades seems inclined to agree, at least when it comes to courage. He says that he would rather die than live as a coward. Apparently, he believes cowardice would be so detrimental to his life that he would prefer not to live as a coward.

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[277] For example, Denyer rejects Socrates' suggestion that the courage and the death are fundamentally different: "For the very thing that makes it courageous to rescue a friend in battle will be the fact that such an action risks death" (145, sv. 115c1). But if the courageousness and the death-causing cannot be distinguished, the idea seems to be, we won't be able to say that the action is good insofar as it is noble, since it is its being something bad—a risking of death—that makes it noble in the first place.

[278] See, e.g., *Gorgias* 470e ff.

[279] *Apology* 25d-e; see also *Rep.* 1.352b-d; *Lysis* 214b-c.

Of course, Socrates has only shown, at best, that *one* noble thing, courage, is good. It does not follow that *everything* noble is good. Alcibiades might be less inclined to agree to a similar argument using justice in the place of courage. Socrates perceptively recognizes the kind of example that Alcibiades will appreciate, but that does not make his argument any more valid.

Socrates' second sub-argument is briefer, and its logical structure is nearly indecipherable. Socrates proposes, and Alcibiades agrees, that "[P1] whoever acts nobly [*kalôs prattein*], also acts well [*eu prattein*]" (116b2-3).[280] This claim sounds right to Alcibiades because Greek associates conceptually the adverbs "*kalôs*" and "*eu*." "*Kalôs prattein*" and *"eu prattein*" are often used interchangeably. Socrates continues:

> S[OCRATES]: And [P2] aren't those who do well [*eu prattontes*] happy [*eudaimones*]?[281]
> A[LCIBIADES]: How not?
> S: [P3] Aren't they happy because they possess [or, acquire] good things [*di' agathôn ktêsin*]?
> A: Certainly.
> S: And [P4] do they acquire good things by acting well and nobly [*tôi eu kai kalôs prattein*]?
> A: Yes.
> S: [C1] So isn't acting [or doing] well a good thing? [*to eu ara prattein agathon;*]
> A: Certainly. (116b2-12)

What's going on? On one reading, P2 and even C1 seem obvious. '*Eu prattein*' often means simply "having things go well in your life." So if a person is "doing well" in this sense, obviously he is happy, and this is a good thing (for him).[282] But P3 and P4 appear to

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[280] I am marking the moves of this argument (i.e., "P1," "C1") for future reference. It is, however, somewhat unclear what are premises and what conclusions, and how the latter follow from the former.
[281] I am not sure whether this claim is supposed to be a premise or a conclusion, for which P3 and P4 provide support. There are few logical particles in this passage. "*Ara*" (with acute accent) appears at 116b10, c1, and c4.
[282] See Denyer (2001), p. 149, note on 116b5.

introduce a more sophisticated line of thought. In P4, '*to eu prattein*' seems to mean, "acting well or correctly"—and thus "acting well" allows the acquisition of good things. The person "acting well" does the right things, manages his household correctly, etc. Because of this, he becomes happy.

However the argument is supposed to go, Alcibiades accepts it. But it gets even murkier as Socrates continues:

> S: [P5] Isn't well-doing [*hê eupragia*] a noble thing?
> A: Yes.
> S: So once again [*palin au*] hasn't it become apparent to us that [C2] the noble and the good are the same?[283]
> A: Apparently.
> S: So what we find to be noble, we will also find to be good, at least according to this argument?
> A: Necessarily. (116b13-c6)

Let's try to track the argument backward, from the conclusion, C2. What's the argument for C2? In part, C2 seems plausible because of the associations between "*eu*" and "*kalôs*" that Socrates fostered in P1 and P4. As those premises showed, these adverbs are often used almost equivalently. If so, why can't their corresponding adjectives, *agathon* and *kalon*, be used in the same way? But the main argument for C2 seems to be from C1 and P5. In short: "*To eu prattein*" is a good thing; "*hê eupragia*" is a noble thing; therefore, the noble and the good are the same.[284]

This reasoning is terrible. It would not be valid, even if "*to eu prattein*" and *"hê eupragia*" were equivalent expressions, and they are not. As Denyer explains:

> If Socrates' argument is to work, Alcibiades must take these two expressions to be equivalent, as their common derivation suggests. But common derivation is no guarantee of common meaning. And *eupragia* can in fact

[283] "*Palin au*" refers to the conclusion of Socrates' first sub-argument, at 116a.
[284] I wish I could do better, but that's all there is!

> be used of altruistic deeds, whose doer would be described as *eu poiôn* or *euergetôn* rather than as *eu prattôn* (as doing good, rather than as doing well). In such a use, but only in such a use, *eupragia* stands for something that would be uncontentiously fine [i.e., *kalon*]. (150, sv. 116b13)

As evidence for his claim about the meaning of *eupragia*, Denyer cites Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1367a4-7, where Aristotle mentions "those *eupragiai* that relate to other people" as among the noble things that might be described in a speech of praise. P5, therefore, sounds plausible to Alcibiades because doing good *deeds*, acting in an other-regarding manner, *is* noble. But we have no reason to accept that '*to eu prattein*'—in the sense of either doing well in life or acting correctly—is equivalent to '*eupragia,*' without further argument.

Once again, however, as with the first sub-argument, Socrates probably thinks that he could supply further arguments in order to make his point, if he needed to. In the *Euthydemus*, as we saw in Chapter 2, he argues that acting correctly is necessary for both *to eu prattein* and *hê eupragia*. But, for Socrates, living well or correctly just is acting virtuously, and it is both noble and good for the virtuous person. The problem is that if Socrates had made these background positions explicit, Alcibiades would have rejected them. He goes along with the arguments only because he does not really know what is going on.

1.5 If my analysis is correct, therefore, none of Socrates' arguments about the relation between justice and benefit is valid. What is their purpose? What is Socrates trying to do with Alcibiades? And what is Plato (or the author of the dialogue, if it is not Plato) trying to do with his readers?

One purpose, of course, is to show Alcibiades that he is ignorant, and Socrates' arguments serve that purpose whether they are valid or not. Alcibiades is baffled by them: "By the gods, Socrates," he says, "I don't know what I mean, but I seem to be in some really strange condition! For when you ask me questions, at one time one set of things seems true, at another time a different set" (116e3-5). His opinions waver, and he is not sure what the truth is. He finds himself giving answers that conflict with his previous beliefs. Socrates diagnoses his condition as ignorance: No one who knows what he is talking about has any problem giving consistent answers to questions (117a). To this extent, then, Socrates has succeeded. He has shaken Alcibiades from his conceit that he already knows all that he needs to know. Alcibiades is particularly disturbed by his inability to defend his convictions about what's beneficial. The argument about justice made him angry; the arguments about what's beneficial really shake him up.[285] He wants to be successful, and it worries him that he might not know what is required for success. From this perspective, it does not matter whether Socrates' arguments are valid or not. Alcibiades cannot see what is wrong with them.

Indeed, the arguments disturb Alcibiades partly because he sees some truth in them. As he says in the passage I quoted above (116e5), some of the things that Socrates says *seem* true to him. That is, despite of the problems in the arguments' *form*, their *content* resonates as true for Alcibiades. The best example of this is the first sub-argument for the conclusion that all noble things are good. Socrates' example in this sub-argument is

[285] Perhaps we can say that Socrates' arguments about whether he learned about justice make him angry, because he feels that he is being treated unjustly by Socrates' argument strategy.

well-chosen, because courage has such a central place in Alcibiades' self-conception.[286] Like Callicles, Alcibiades resists the idea that a cowardly life could be better than a courageous one.[287] But once Socrates gets him to start thinking about life in terms of honor and nobility rather than profit, the suggestion that the noble is good and beneficial begins to seem more plausible. Therefore, Socrates changes Alcibiades' way of thinking; but he does not compel the young man through the *logical* force of his argument, but through the suggestive example. The example causes Alcibiades to see things from Socrates' point of view, to have some grasp of Socrates' way of looking at things. Something similar, I believe, is behind Alcibiades' acceptance of the second sub-argument. He accepts it because he intuitively appreciates the association between the various notions at play, even though he does not understand.

Socrates' arguments in this section, therefore, serve not only to humble Alcibiades—to unsettle his self-confidence and push him away from his unreflective beliefs—but also to draw him forward into a new perspective. As in the *Euthydemus* and *Lysis*, Socrates does not produce a complete or valid argument for his position. But neither does he intend to do so. For one thing, as I've said before (Ch. 2, § 4.5), Socrates' window for making an impression upon Alcibiades is limited. He uses short, provocative arguments because he does not have time to develop more complete ones. But the arguments' very brevity and incompleteness also serve important functions in turning his young interlocutors toward

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[286] As Denyer points out, "Alcibiades was in fact decorated for his valour in battle" (146, sv. 115d7). Denyer cites *Symposium* 220d-e, Isoc. 16.28, and Antisthenes fr. 200.

[287] At *Gorg.* 497e ff., Socrates attacks Callicles' view that maximal pleasure is the good by arguing that cowardly men experience equal or possibly greater pleasure than courageous men. Callicles is unwilling to admit that cowardly men live as good or better lives than courageous ones, and he changes his theory, claiming now that some pleasures are better and others worse (499b). McKim (1986) argues, plausibly, that Callicles changes his view because he is ashamed of the consequences that Socrates has revealed for his old view. Similarly, Alcibiades' sense of honor leads him to agree that courage is not only noble, but also good and beneficial.

philosophy. They pose a challenge; but they also suggest a deeper truth. In this case, had things gone as Socrates intended, although Alcibiades might have eventually seen problems in the arguments, he would have remembered that he saw something right in them. He would have been ashamed to return to his former view, and he would have been driven by his ambitious nature to find the truth.[288]

Something similar happens for the readers. We see something of ourselves in Alcibiades and his ignorance. We also are challenged by Socrates' arguments. Now, since we can spend more time going over the text, discussing and thinking about its arguments, we can spot their flaws more easily than Alcibiades can. But that does not prevent the dialogue from doing its work upon us. Even in analyzing the arguments, we are practicing philosophy. And, hopefully, to the extent that we also find resonances of truth in what Socrates says, we'll be driven to work out for ourselves what that truth is.

1.6 The cure for the ignorance that we find ourselves in, according to Socrates, is to be humble about what we know. Socrates says, "Don't you realize that the errors in our conduct are caused by this kind of ignorance, of thinking that we know when we don't know?" (117d). This is because, if we don't think we understand something, we don't set out to do it ourselves but leave it to others who do know. The only people who make mistakes are those who think they understand something when they don't, because they try

[288] Perhaps Alcibiades did feel this way. At *Symposium* 215e ff., Alcibiades says, "[Socrates] makes it seem that my life isn't worth living! [...] He always traps me, you see, and he makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect: my personal shortcomings, which cry out for the closest attention. So I refuse to listen to him; I stop my ears and tear myself away, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die." (Translations of the *Symposium* are from Nehamas and Woodruff.) According to Alcibiades, Socrates shames him and makes him want to live better. But he avoids Socrates, because he knows that if he gave in to his Siren call, he would have to give up his political career.

to do things they are not qualified to do (117d-8e).[289] This lack of insight ("*agnoia*"), Socrates says, is "the cause of bad things and the most reproachable ignorance [*hê eponeidistos amathia*]" (118a5-6).[290] In thinking he can engage in a political life without first tending to himself, Alcibiades displays this kind of ignorance. He thinks he understands justice, benefit, and the good. But Socrates has revealed his ignorance about these things. Alcibiades needs to get an education ("*paideuthênai*") before going into politics (118b9).

2. Spartans and Persians

2.1 At this point in the discussion, Socrates has achieved part of his purpose: He's shaken Alcibiades' confidence. He's planted the suspicion in Alcibiades' mind that if he gets up to speak and give the Athenians his advice, he might not have anything worth saying. Socrates therefore challenges him to take responsibility for himself and to take the active care and management of his life that Socrates thinks is crucial for happiness: "What do you intend to do about yourself? Do you intend to allow yourself to remain as you are now, or to take some *epimeleia* for yourself [*epimeleian tina poieisthai*]?" (119a8-9).

But Alcibiades isn't willing to give in yet: "Let's consider it together [*koinê boulê*], Socrates," he says (119b1). After all, as Socrates himself argued, no other Athenian politicians are educated (118c-9a).[291] So, "why should I train and take trouble studying? For I know well that I will be very much superior to them at least in nature [*têi ge phusei*]"

[289] Compare *Euthyd.* 280e ff., Ch. 2, § 2.2.
[290] Cf. *Apology* 29b.
[291] Socrates argues that even Pericles, Alcibiades' guardian, was also deficient in education: A real expert can make others expert in what he knows, but Pericles failed. Alcibiades and his brother are prime evidence of his failure (118e).

(119b8-c1). Alcibiades expresses the aristocratic point of view that victories earned by natural talent are better than those earned through training and learning.[292]

In order to break Alcibiades out of his complacency, Socrates has to try something different. He uses Alcibiades' political and aristocratic pretensions against him. Alcibiades is proposing, Socrates says, to compete with the democratic politicians on their own level. Socrates mocks Alcibiades for this idea:

> But no sir, you have to keep an eye on Midias the quail-fighter and such people—people who set their hands to doing the city's business, while still having and not having thrown off the 'slave-boy' hairstyles (as the women would say) on their souls, because of their boorishness [*hup' amousias*]. Still speaking with foreign accents [*eti de barbarizontes*], they have come to fawn upon the city, not to rule it. (120a9-b5)

Socrates takes an almost unbelievably scathing tone in this passage. Socrates rarely praises the democratic government of Athens, but here we see a new level of rancor.[293] Why? On the one hand, he is angry at Alcibiades' complacency, as he says (119c5). But he is also taking advantage of Alcibiades' prejudices and aristocratic pride. Athenian politics, Socrates implies, is the business of the lower classes, of people who are not far from being slaves or barbarians. Alcibiades' ambition should be not to compete with these kinds of people, but to rule them as their true superior:

> Look here, if you were intending to steer a ship into battle, would it suffice for you to be the best sailor at steering? Granted that's necessary, but wouldn't you keep your eye on your real opponents and not on your

[292] Denyer cites Pindar, *O.*9.100-2: "What comes by breeding is always best; but many people have set out to win glory by getting instruction in great deeds." Alcibiades reveals his aristocratic sentiments in 120a ff. At 121a, he boasts about his noble lineage "back to Eurysaces and [...] back to Zeus." Socrates pokes fun at this claim: "Mine goes back to Daedalus and Daedalus' goes back to Hephaestus, son of Zeus" (a3-4). Socrates is a descendent of Daedalus only insofar as his father was a sculptor; nevertheless, this lineage is hardly more fanciful and irrelevant than Alcibiades'.

[293] I did not realize how insulting Socrates was being until I looked at this passage in Greek. According to Denyer, Midias, the lower-class Athenian politician and quail-fighter, seems to have become something of a stock character in comedy (he cites Aristophanes, *Birds* 1297-8 and scholion). Moreover, at 120b3 ("*phaien an hai gunaikes*"), Socrates is apparently mimicking a feminine accent. See Denyer 168.

> comrades, as you're doing now? Surely you ought to be so far superior to them that they're happy to be your humble comrades in the struggle, and wouldn't dream of competing with you. (119d4-e2)

A true leader is not the one who happens to come out on top in political competition, but one who rules through superior ability.[294] His followers accept his rule because they recognize him as superior.[295] If Alcibiades intends to distinguish himself "with some noble deed," he needs to be this kind of leader (119e3). Once again, Socrates is pushing Alcibiades to set higher goals for himself. If all he wants to be is another common politician, he might have what he needs. But Socrates hopes he'll aspire to something greater.

Alcibiades' real rivals in greatness, Socrates says, are not the petty politicians of Athens, but the leaders of Sparta and Persia (120a).[296] In a long speech, Socrates argues that Alcibiades' assets, in which he has such confidence, do not come to much in comparison to theirs (120e-4a). Their families are just as noble, if not more; they were better educated; and they have more wealth than any Athenian could hope to have. As Socrates tells him,

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[294] According to Forde (1987), the image that Socrates is building in this passage is his main lure for Alcibiades. Socrates is encouraging Alcibiades to imagine being honored not only by his fellow Athenians, but by all of their rivals, as well.

[295] Of course, this is not an easy thing that Socrates is holding out for Alcibiades: First he has to become worthy of ruling, then he has to get others to recognize his worth. Socrates seems to hold out a similar sort of promise (also with mention of the king of Persia) to Lysis (*Lysis* 210a; see ch. 3, § 2.3).

[296] Some commentators, including, prominently, Schleiermacher (1836), argue that Socrates' praise of the Spartans and Persians is problematic and a reason to doubt the dialogue's authenticity. But, as Gordon (2003) points out, Socrates' discussion of the Spartans and Persians is not unequivocally laudatory (14-5). Most of his 'praise' is for things that elsewhere in the dialogue Socrates argues are not important, like noble birth and wealth. So why does he mention them? And why does he say that *they* are Alcibiades' real rivals for greatness? Socrates says that they are Alcibiades' rivals because they are the "leaders of the opposing camp," the ones against whom Alcibiades would presumably be leading Athens (120a). He also brings them up, no doubt, because these are people against whom Alcibiades would judge his own accomplishments (see 105c). But if, as Gordon suggests, Socrates' praise of the Spartans and Persians is ironic, his claim that they are Alcibiades' true rivals for greatness is probably ironic as well. The example of the Spartans and Persians is meant to get Alcibiades to look past the democratic political activities of Athens; but neither does Socrates think that Alcibiades should aim for the sort of tyrannical authority that the Persian King has (see below).

> No, my excellent friend, listen to me and to the Delphic inscription, 'know thyself': These are our rivals, not the ones you think, and we have no hope of prevailing over them in any other way unless it is through *epimeleia* and skill [*epimeleiai te kai technêi*]. If you fall short in these, you will fall short of becoming famous in Greece as well as abroad, which I think is what you desire [*eran*] as no one else desires anything. (124a8-b6)

So far, Alcibiades has no advantage over the Spartans and Persians. If he is to achieve his ambition and accomplish something great, he must do so by taking greater *epimeleia*.

In this passage, Socrates urges Alcibiades to "know thyself." (This continues to be an important theme in the rest of the dialogue.) Alcibiades' problem is that he does not have a realistic view of himself and his place in the order of the world. In the tiny world of his life so far, he has always been the best and most capable. The story about the Spartans and Persians is meant to give Alcibiades some perspective. Clearly, one of the functions of this story is to deflate Alcibiades' self-confidence. In the larger view, the assets in which he has such pride, which have granted him easy success in his life so far, are really nothing special. (Even his enemy's wives taunt him for his presumption in competing with their husbands and sons (123c-4a).) But the story also brings into view a wider perspective on the "greatness" that Alcibiades seeks. As it turns out, of course, Socrates doesn't think the Persians and Spartan kings are ideal leaders. Like the Athenians, they pay attention to their wealth or their bodies, not their souls and the souls of their citizens. But Alcibiades admires them, and by mentioning them, Socrates continues to draw Alcibiades' view toward greater goals—although he will not stop there.

3. *Epimeleia, koinê boulê,* and *sôphrosunê*

3.1 At last Alcibiades begins to recognize and acknowledge his situation. He wants to live a truly great life, and finally he sees that he does not know what a great life is or how to

get there. Humbled, he asks Socrates: "What kind of *epimeleia* is it necessary to take, Socrates? Are you able to lead the way? For, more than anything, you seem to have spoken truly" (124b7-9).

Here we have a significant change in the tone of the dialogue, and Socrates' response marks that change:

> Yes—but let's consider together [*koinê boulê*] how we can become as good as possible. You know, what I've said about you needing to be educated applies to me as well [...] (124c1-3)

A few lines ago, Socrates was lecturing Alcibiades at length about his deficiencies. Now that Alcibiades shows genuine interest,[297] however, Socrates proposes that they take *koinê boulê*—that they join together as fellow searchers, both in need of education.[298] They *both* need *epimeleia*, and they should pursue it together.

What we see here in the *Alcibiades* is, in fact, only a more explicit version of what happened in the *Euthydemus* and *Lysis*. In those dialogues, Socrates starts out leading the discussion. He asks questions, and the boys with whom he talks follow along. There is no pretense that what is happening is a cooperative investigation. When Socrates leads Clinias through the conceptual relations between wisdom, happiness, and the good, and when he demonstrates to Lysis that his parents will not love him unless he becomes wise, he is, in both cases, giving a *demonstration* and *convincing* the boys of something, not *investigating*

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[297] At least, Alcibiades seems genuine now. As we know, the lesson doesn't stick. In the end, Alcibiades does not understand the crucial point that Socrates is trying to show him.

[298] Socrates' words, *koinê boulê,* echo Alcibiades' at 119b; Socrates thought that Alcibiades might have been convinced, but Alcibiades was only trying to weasel out of the argument. As a result, what followed was not *koinê boulê* at all, but several pages of stern lecture. Perhaps this explains why Socrates gives such an uncharacteristically long speech. He is trying to put Alcibiades in his place. Something similar occurs at the end of the *Gorgias* when Socrates, in a last ditch attempt to change Callicles' mind, tells his myth about the judgment that awaits everyone after death (523a ff.).

Note that, in Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*, Socrates uses similar language in response to Alcibiades' request for help: "In the future, let's consider things together [*bouleuomenoi*]. We'll always do what seems best to the two of us" (219a-b).

together with them. The arguments of the first half of the *Alcibiades* are more confrontational, but similar in many ways. But, in all three cases, after the initial lesson, Socrates accepts the interlocutor into *koinê boulê*. Ideally, if not in fact, the youths all become Socrates' partners in his search.[299]

3.2 Through the rest of the dialogue, then, Socrates and Alcibiades investigate this problem: How does one take *epimeleia* for oneself? First, given that we want to become as good as possible, Socrates asks, what kind of excellence ("*tina aretên;*") do we need to get? (124e1-4). Alcibiades answers that we need to get the virtue that good men have, which is concerned with taking care of business ("*prattein ta pragmata,*" e7). Specifically, we want to be able do what good men ("*hoi kaloi kagathoi*") do, who are capable of ruling in the city (124e17; 125b9). At Socrates' prompting, Alcibiades specifies: A good man is one who rules over "those who take a part in civil society and make a mutual contribution [*koinônountôn* [...] *politeias kai sumballontôn pros allêlous*]" (125d7-8). And the knowledge (*epistêmê*) possessed by the good ruler, which enables him to do this, Alcibiades says, is the ability to deliberate well (*euboulia*) (e6). But to deliberate well about what? "About the better management of the city and its being safe," Alcibiades answers (126a4). And that comes about, he says, when mutual friendship ("*philia* [...] *pros allêlous*") is present, and hatred and insurrection ("*to misein de kai stasiazein*") are absent from the city (c1-3). Friendship and hatred in the city are analogous to health and disease

[299] At least as Socrates tells the story, Clinias does join in the investigation (289d ff.; see Ch. 2, § 5.2). Socrates says that Lysis and Menexenus have something to teach him about friendship, but they do not contribute much to the subsequent investigation (Ch. 3, §§ 4.1-4.3). In this case, as well, Socrates is probably being ironic when he implies that Alcibiades can help him. But perhaps Alcibiades would help him, somewhere down the road (see below, §3.5).

in the body, on this account. The goal of the good man who rules the citizens is, like a doctor, to promote the city's health while curing or purging its diseases.

Alcibiades' answers here reveal that, despite his arrogance and mistakes about justice, Socrates' faith in him is not completely misplaced. Once he stops thinking of politics in terms of his personal advantage, he has some good ideas. The idea that the statesman's job is, among other things, to foster mutual friendship among citizens is developed in the *Republic*, where one of the purposes of the education and social structure is to ensure that the citizens are pleased and pained by the same things, so that they are unified and not divided by their contrary reactions (5.462a-c).

Here, however, Socrates immediately raises a problem with Alcibiades' account. According to Alcibiades, a good city is characterized by mutual friendship (*philia*). Socrates asks for clarification: By friendship, do you mean "agreement [*homonoia*]"? (126c). Alcibiades agrees that he does. Socrates is introducing an important term from Greek political discussions.[300] *Homonoia* literally means "being of the same mind"—concord or agreement in a broad sense. So this probably is what Alcibiades has in mind when he says that *philia* is the health of the city. But Socrates wants to know what Alcibiades means by *homonoia*. How does it come about? What sort of *homonoia* does the statesman try to promote? These are difficult questions, and Alcibiades proves unable to answer them.

[300] As Denyer explains, "[*homonoia* is] a key concept in Greek political thought. It and its relationships to friendship, justice and moderation were much discussed. The etymology of the word *homonoia* ('sameness of mind') allows it to stand in for any sort of agreement. In political contexts, however, the word was used for a rather special sort of agreement, and much of the philosophical discussion tried to articulate what sort of agreement that was" (202, sv. 126c4).

In many cases, Socrates suggests, agreement is brought about by skills (*technai*). The skills of measuring and weighing, for example, make people agree about lengths and weights (126d).[301] What craft makes people agree in the city? Alcibiades is not sure; he says, "I suppose that I mean the friendship and *homonoia* that a father and mother exhibit in agreeing [*homonoei*] with a son they love, and a brother with a brother and wife with her husband" (126e3-5). But, Socrates argues, husbands and wives have different skills. The husband doesn't know anything and thus cannot "be of the same mind" as his wife when it comes to wool-working; nor can she "be of the same mind" as him when it comes to military tactics. Therefore, Socrates concludes, "in these areas, at least, there is not *homonoia* between women and men" (127a9-10). But then, if friendship is *homonoia*, it follows that, in these areas, men and women do not love each other. The general idea behind what Socrates is saying I'll call 'principle H':

H. Persons X and Y have *homonoia* only if they do, know, and think about the same things.

But, Socrates implies, only those who share a *technê* can know and think about the same things. Principle H creates a problem for Alcibiades. Alcibiades believes that cities are well governed when and only when their citizens have *homonoia*. But, from principle H, it follows that cities are *not* well governed when each citizen does his own work (b4-5)—after all, the carpenter will not be doing or thinking about the same things as the shoe-maker,

[301] Literally, "each person is himself of the same mind as himself [*hekastos autos hautôi homonoei*] [...] through the art of measurement" (126d). Apparently, until a person has the appropriate *technê* or *epistêmê*, he will not be of the same mind as himself—compare what Socrates says earlier to Alcibiades about his ignorance: "You tell me you are wavering about what is just and unjust, admirable and contemptible, good and bad, and advantageous and disadvantageous. Isn't it obvious that the reason you waver about them is that you don't know about them?" (117a). Also, in the *Lysis*: "The bad [...] are never alike, not even to themselves. They are out of kilter and unstable" (214d). For the art of measurement as the solution to this problem, see *Protagoras* 356d-e. In that passage, Socrates explores the possibility that an "art of measurement" could resolve the conflicts and uncertainty created by appearances and, presumably, allow us all to be of the same mind regarding ethical questions.

and so they won't have *homonoia.* Alcibiades thinks this result is absurd: He thinks that cities *are* well governed and exemplify friendship when citizens do their own work (127b). Socrates and Alcibiades agree that justice occurs in cities when people do their own work (127c). But then, it seems that just cities, precisely in virtue of being just, would lack *homonoia* and friendship. Obviously, something has gone wrong. Alcibiades does not know what to say, and he is shamed by his ignorance. "I am likely," he says, "to have been in a most shameful state [*aischista echôn*] for a long time without noticing it" (127d7-8).

What this passage shows is that, although Alcibiades has some promising ideas, he does not know how to develop or defend them. In this passage, Alcibiades' problems are caused by principle H. In a sense, it is true that people who know and think about different subjects are not of the "same mind." The carpenter thinks in detail about how he is putting the house together; non-carpenters cannot do that. The husband cannot be of the same mind as his wife when she is working her wool. But this is not the sense that *homonoia* has in political contexts or even in a marriage, nor is it the sense in which *philia* involves *homonoia*. In these latter cases, *homonoia* means something like "harmony."[302] It's the sharing of a common purpose and sentiments, concord amongst people *despite* their different occupations, experience, and history. For example, a husband and wife's *homonoia* consists (in part) in their sharing a project of maintaining a family and household. But, to do that effectively (especially in ancient Athens), they have to divide the responsibilities. The wife has to let the husband take care of military and business matters,

[302] This is how Woodruff (2005) translates *homonoia*.

and he has to let her do what she judges best when it comes to wool-working.[303] *Homonoia* of this sort is an important characteristic of the perfectly just city outlined in the *Republic*.[304]

Alcibiades, however, does not understand this. Socrates gives him a chance to repudiate principle H—"Is it possible for *homonoia* to arise on those matters that some know, and others do not?" (127c2-3). He does not take it. Then, when the problem becomes entirely clear, Socrates challenges Alcibiades to find another way out: "Then what *do* you mean by this 'friendship' and 'agreement' that we must be wise and good advisors in if we're to be good men?" (127d1-3). Socrates does not reject Alcibiades' idea outright, and there is no reason to think that Alcibiades could not give a good answer to this question if he knew more. He needs to find another way of cashing out *homonoia*, other than in terms of sharing of *technê,* to formulate his view more completely and precisely so that it can avoid the problems. If he is not able to defend his view, and if he becomes confused under questioning, he does not yet know it. But if he is going to give advice about *homonoia*, he has to understand what it is.

Alcibiades does not take up this challenge, at least for now. But it is a challenge for the readers of the dialogue, as well. The question is, what is the *homonoia* that characterizes good cities?[305] I've said something about how I think the answer to this

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[303] Denyer claims that the problem with the argument is Socrates' assumption that *homonoia* is produced by a *technê*. According to Denyer, justice produces *homonoia*, but justice is not a craft (Denyer 203). Be that as it may, the challenge for Alcibiades is to reconcile his belief that *homonoia* is an important component of a good city with his belief that a city is well-governed when everyone does his own work. It may be that justice, properly understood, brings about both of these things. See Friedländer (1964, vol. 2), 237.

[304] The people in the Kallipolis are pleased and pained by the same things, regardless of their social class; they agree about who should rule, and about the values of the city. I take the sharing of values in this way to be a definitive feature of political *homonoia* (though we might deny the need for the particularly strong form of *homonoia* that Plato requires).

[305] According to Vlastos (1973), Plato never did succeed in developing an adequate account of the *homonoia* that binds together cities. Vlastos explains that Plato believed that a city is unified only if all its citizens share

question would go, but there is certainly more to say, not only about friendship and *homonoia* themselves, but also about their relation to other virtues of cities. Indeed, although *homonoia* and *philia* are important, they don't seem to be enough, in themselves, to make for a good city. That is because it is possible to have a city in which everyone agrees and is in harmony, but has the wrong values. For example, in *Rep.* I, Socrates argues that a band of robbers or thieves with a common unjust purpose can achieve their goals only if they do not do injustice to each other (351c). If a band of robbers that exemplifies *homonoia* were possible, it would seem that *homonoia* is not enough. The group needs also to be united for a good, just purpose. The degenerate cities of the *Republic* may provide another example: The timocratic city, for example, values honor. But since honor is not worth valuing in itself, a city that values honor without being guided by the good goes astray. A good city like Kallipolis has a special kind of *homonoia*, which can only be brought about by justice and the proper orientation to the good.[306]

3.3 Alcibiades' ideas, then, are incomplete. He does not know how to reconcile his views about *homonoia* with his conviction that a just and good city is one in which people do their own business.[307] But Socrates does not pursue the idea further here. Instead, he approaches the problem in a different way. We know we need to take *epimeleia* for

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the same values, and he did not realize that love and community unity can include respect for and appreciation of the different values of one's friends and fellow-citizens (17-18).

[306] The problem posed here of understanding *homonoia* is parallel to the problem posed in the *Lysis* of understanding how friends are *oikeioi* (see 222b-d). Both terms gesture at something important that binds us together in friendships and communities, but which can be misunderstood if not taken in the right way. Cf. also Diotima's argument against the *oikeios* as beloved at *Symposium* 205e-6a.

[307] See Friedländer (1964, v. 2): "The first movement [of the second half of the dialogue] explores the nature of political action up to the point where we see, as yet in unresolved opposition, the centripetal principle of 'friendship' or 'community' and the centrifugal principle of 'doing one's own.' This contradiction is resolved—if we think beyond this discussion—when we realize that it is the task of the true statesman to reconcile these two principles, in thought as well as action" (237).

ourselves. But what is it that we are supposed to take *epimeleia* for? What are "our selves"? As Socrates puts it,

> What is this 'taking *epimeleia* for oneself' [*to heautou epimeleisthai*]—for I fear that we might, as may well happen, fail to notice that we are not taking *epimeleia* for ourselves, although we think we are—and when does a person do this? (127e8-8a2)

The problem, Socrates explains, is that many people (including Alcibiades) think that they are taking *epimeleia* for themselves when they tend to their belongings ("*tôn hautou*") (128a).[308] They learn skills (*technai*) for tending to their clothes, bodies, and estates and believe that they are thereby tending to themselves. But what skill actually tends to our *selves*? As Socrates says, "Could we ever know [*gnoimen*] what skill makes a person better if we did not know what in the world we ourselves are? [...] If we knew [what we are], perhaps we would know what the *epimeleia* of ourselves was, but if we don't know [the former], we'll never know [the latter]" (128e10-9a9).[309] Before a person can tend to herself, according to Socrates, she must know what her *self* is to which she must tend.

Socrates argues that, in fact, a person's self is her soul. The body and its possessions, he contends, are like tools that the soul uses, like a shoemaker's knife or a musician's lyre (129b-e). For example, when a shoemaker makes shoes, he uses not only his knives and scrapers, but also his hands and his eyes (129c, d). Generally, in the same way, Socrates says, the person uses her whole body (129e). But, Alcibiades and Socrates

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[308] The "possessions" or "belongings" of the body, according to Socrates, are things like rings, shoes, and clothing. Socrates is using the genitive construction in this passage: Thus, a ring is "of a finger [*daktulou*]," a shoes is "of a foot [*podos*]," and so on (128a8-11).

[309] Socrates asks Alcibiades whether it is difficult to know oneself, and Alcibiades replies, "Sometimes I think, Socrates, that anyone can do it, but then sometimes I think it is extremely difficult." I think that Alcibiades is right. At first glance, it seems that there is nothing easier to know than your self. You know yourself better than anyone else ever can. But there is a deeper sense of knowing oneself that is much more difficult to achieve. Thus, it all depends on what "knowing oneself" consists in.

agree, "the user is different from the thing used" (129e6). Therefore the person herself, who uses and rules her body, is her soul (130a-c). The Delphic Oracle's injunction to "know thyself," therefore, really commands that we know our souls (130e). And, according to Socrates, knowing oneself is *sôphrosunê*—soundness of mind, moderation, or self-control (131b).[310] Skills for understanding, tending to, and using other things, therefore, won't make one better and more *sôphrôn*. We need to know and tend to our souls.[311]

This conclusion has some important consequences. First, it follows that when people engage in other crafts, they are not taking care of themselves. Skills like farming, medicine, and so on do not tend for the soul, but for the body and its possessions. But, then, Socrates says, this sort of craftsman "is not, in fact, doing his own work [*ou ta hautou ara eti prattei*]" (131c).[312] Second, on this account, Socrates is Alcibiades' only true lover (131e). All others loved only Alcibiades' body, which is why they've left him now that he's older and lost the bloom of his youth. But Alcibiades' body is merely a possession, not Alcibiades himself. Alcibiades himself, whom Socrates loves, is his soul.

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[310] This claim may seem out of place and unmotivated, but, as Annas (1985) explains, at least before Aristotle, the term '*sôphrosunê*' covered a broad range including both self-knowledge and self-control and could be used comfortably as referring to either quality (118-9). So the claim that *sôphrosunê* is identical to self-knowledge would not have seemed false to the Greeks. Both Plato (also in the *Charmides,* 164c-5b) and Heraclitus (frs. 101, 113, and 116) link *sôphrosunê* and self-knowledge. According to Annas, Plato develops the idea that self-knowledge is the essence of *sôphrosunê*, while self-control is merely the behavioral result of the underlying self-knowledge, and she argues that, for Plato, self-knowledge means knowing not your personality but rather your place and role in society (120-2). I say more about Annas' interpretation below.

[311] Near the end of the *Gorgias*, Socrates describes the *technê* by which souls are improved. Each sort of craftsman (*technikos*), he says, "places what he does into a certain organization, and compels one thing to be suited to another and to fit to it until the entire object is put together in an organized and orderly way" (504a). Therefore the craftsman of the soul, the "skilled and good orator," would seek to introduce the states of order and organization into the souls of those over whom he has care (504c-e; see also 464a-5e; 506c-e). Presumably, a person taking *epimeleia* for her own soul would practice a version of the same *technê.*

[312] This conclusion suggests an interesting possible resolution of the *aporia* of the previous argument about *homonoia*. Maybe it is like this: When people do their physical jobs, they are not really doing their own work. Their real work is to know and tend to their souls. So, insofar as people do their jobs, they are not of the same mind. But insofar as they are taking care of their souls, they are exercising the same efforts, doing the same thing, and are therefore of the same mind.

3.4 Real *epimeleia* for the self, therefore, is for the soul.[313] It requires that we have *sôphrosunê*—that we know ourselves. We need to understand what we are tending, what its nature is.[314] But, Alcibiades wants to know, how exactly do we get this knowledge? Socrates answers by producing one of the most compelling but puzzling images in the dialogue.[315]

Socrates lays out his suggestion as follows: Suppose, he says, that the inscription at Delphi had said to our eyes, "see thyself [*ide sauton*]" (130d6). How would they do it? They would need to look into something in which they could see themselves, like a mirror (132d-e). The eye of another person, in particular, his pupil, provides just such a mirror for an eye to see itself.[316] "Therefore," he says, "an eye, if it should gaze at an eye, looking into that part of it that is best and with which it sees, in this way would see itself" (133a6-8). Socrates suggests that the same thing applies to the soul: "If the soul, dear Alcibiades, intends to know [*gnôsesthai*] itself, it must look into a soul, and especially into that place in

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[313] Socrates tells Alcibiades, "We ought to tend to our souls [*tês psuchês epimelêteon*] and look to that [...] And we ought to hand over to others the *epimeleia* of our bodies and property" (132c1-5).

[314] A *technê* has an "account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them" and is able "to state the cause of each thing" that happens in its object (*Gorgias* 465a). Thus a craft for taking *epimeleia* for the soul would understand the nature of the soul over which it operates, what its good condition is, and how it comes to be in that good condition.

[315] Friedländer's evaluation of this passage is enthusiastic: "How self-knowledge is possible is shown through an image that has lasted the ages and alone would put the seal of authenticity upon this dialogue" (237). Annas's assessment, however, is perhaps more realistic: "Plato's image of the eye mirrored in another eye is a very striking one, so striking that it is hard not to surrender to its intuitive appeal rather than pressing for a satisfactory interpretation of it" (132). Annas recognizes that, despite the image's power, it is very difficult to work out exactly how it is supposed to work.

[316] If we were inclined to nitpick, we might wonder why we'd bother looking into another person's eyes, if we had access to a mirror. After all, pupils do not provide very good reflections. The image is very small, which, as Socrates says (133a3), is why the word for pupil, *korê*, also means, and was originally derived from, the word for "miniature" or "doll" (see Denyer 232-3). Annas and Denyer provide different explanations of the move. Annas points out that, at the time, mirrors were made of metal, so they probably weren't good enough to give clear reflections of eyes (132 n. 51). Denyer suggests that since mirrors were "decidedly unmanly," so Socrates "saves Alcibiades from the absurdity of claiming that we can see ourselves (that is, our souls) in a mirror" (231 sv. 132e3, e4). Of course, the obvious explanation for why Socrates shifts from the mirror to the eye is that he needs to get his analogy off the ground so that it makes the point he's trying to make.

which the virtue of the soul, wisdom, occurs, and at anything else which is really similar to it" (133b7-10). It must look into the place "where knowing and understanding take place," which "resembles the divine" (133c1, 5).

As most commentators agree, this is a striking and compelling image. Part of its power and attraction derives from its deeply erotic character. The image of lovers gazing into each other's eyes has a long tradition in Greek literature.[317] Socrates' version, gazing into another's soul, suggests an even deeper intimacy. Nevertheless, it is unclear how precisely it is supposed to work, what the analogy recommends that we do. It is easy to understand how an eye could see itself in another eye, since eyes are visible, as are the images that appear on them, given the right conditions. But how do you "see" a soul? How does another's soul reflect yours back to you? What do you and your partner need to do? Finally, what precisely do you see of yourself, and what do you learn?

I start with the last two questions: What is this self-knowledge? According to Annas (1986), the Greek concern with self-knowledge was very different from ours:

> One form it does *not* take is the modern concern with self-knowledge as knowledge of the individual personality. [...] It is clear that in the ancient world the individual personality was not, in this connection, the relevant self to know. What is relevant is knowing myself in the sense of knowing my place in society, knowing who I am and where I stand in relation to others. (121)

Annas emphasizes that, for the ancients, knowing myself is an "objective rather than a personal or subjective matter" (122). What the inscription on the wall of the Delphic oracle was bidding visitors to *know* about themselves is that they are humans, not gods.[318]

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[317] See Denyer, 229, for references.

[318] According to Nilsson (1969), the average Greek would understand the injunction "know thyself" as meaning "Know that you are human and nothing more" (78).

Sôphrosunê can be equivalent to self-knowledge because self-knowledge involves knowing and acting in accordance with your place, as limited and mortal, in the order of things.

Annas proceeds to argue that, in fact, what Socrates is recommending we know is something that is not personal or individual at all: "Perhaps my real self, far from being my individual embodied personality, is something that does not differ among embodied individuals." She argues that, for Socrates, "the real self is impersonal" and "is the same in all its instances" (131). On this account, then, *my* real self is identical to *your* real self, and, moreover, both our selves are identical to "God, the ultimate reality" (133).[319]

In making this argument, however, Annas goes beyond what the text can support. For one thing, the usual ancient conception of self-knowledge that she describes does not *exclude* knowledge about and reference to the personal and individual. In fact, when I recognize my place in the world, I learn an objective fact that nevertheless makes *essential* reference to me as an individual. Think of a map marked with an arrow, "You are here." The map provides an objective representation, but it also includes a reference to me and to my place in the representation. Insofar as the map is meant to show me where I am, its reference to my *individual* position is *essential* to the map's function.[320]

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[319] A similar argument is advanced by Johnson (1999). Rappe (1995), focusing mostly on the *Charmides* and *Theaetetus*, also concludes that Plato thinks the true self is impersonal (she does not go so far as to say that it is God), but she does not use the *Alcibiades*.

[320] Besides the "objective" character of self-knowledge in ancient thought, Annas appeals to two pieces of evidence from the dialogue for her interpretation. First, she uses Socrates' brief mention of the "self-itself [*auto to auto*]," which, if we knew, we would know what we ourselves are (129b, 130d). Annas argues that this refers to "soul conceived of impersonally, a 'self-itself' or impersonal self which, like a Form, is the same in all of its instances"—similar to the Neoplatonic "rational soul" that all rational beings share (131). I do not think the passage must be read in such a strong way. Perhaps a more natural way to understand the "self itself" is as the type of which we, as individuals, are tokens. In any event, the reference is unclear. The second piece of evidence to which Annas appeals is 133c5, where Socrates says that a person looking into the soul will also grasp "all the divine, both God and wisdom." From this, Annas infers that, in looking into a soul, we come to know God, who is our true self. But, once again, it is not clear that Socrates is saying what Annas claims he is. In the lines leading up to this, Socrates says that the rational region of the soul is "more

Another reason for rejecting Annas' more extreme interpretation is that it does not fit with what Socrates does in the dialogue. After all, presumably Socrates' goal in talking to Alcibiades has been, at least in part, to convey self-knowledge to Alcibiades.[321] We'd expect Socrates to practice what he preaches. Indeed, Socrates' efforts do seem designed to give Alcibiades a kind of self-knowledge. At first, Alcibiades thinks he has everything he needs to be successful; he believes that he already understands justice and benefit. Socrates' arguments show him that, on the contrary, he does not know what he needs to know, and so far in his life he has been "wedded to stupidity" (118b7). Eventually, Alcibiades admits, "I am likely to have been in a most shameful state [*aischista echôn*] for a long time *without noticing it*" (127d7-8, my emphasis). In other words, before Socrates reflects back to him the state of his soul, Alcibiades does not know how bad of shape he is in. In fact, as I argued above, Alcibiades apparently doesn't understand even his own ambitions before Socrates comes along (§1.1, §2.1).[322] Before Socrates confronts him, Alcibiades is fully aware neither of his limitations nor of his deep passion for greatness.

In this way, therefore, Socrates reflects Alcibiades' self back to him, exposing him to his own scrutiny and shame. When Alcibiades sees himself for what he is, he feels shame and wants to become a better person (see 116e and esp. 127d, cited in § 3.2). But

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divine [*theioteron*]" than any other region of it, and that this part of the soul is "like God [*tôi theôi ... eoiken*]" (c1, c4). That is, he says that the rational region of the soul is *like* God, not that it *is* God. Presumably, then, in looking at the divinity in the soul, we learn something about God (and about wisdom). But that does not mean that we *are* God or, in particular, that our true self is impersonal.

[321] Thus Gordon writes, "The resonance between the earlier and later parts of the dialogue indicates that self-knowledge is a necessary condition for knowing what one ought and ought not to value and care for, and the earlier parts of the dialogue, which do not refer to self-knowledge explicitly, can still therefore be considered to be about Alcibiades' profound lack of self-knowledge" (20). I agree generally with Gordon here, but with some further additions. See below.

[322] According to Gordon, "Alcibiades' own misplaced ambitions are mirrored to him in Socrates' descriptions of the power and riches amassed by the Spartans and the Persians, and then undermined in stark contrast to care and wisdom. [...] [The story about the Spartans and Persians] functions first to bait Alcibiades' desires and then to redirect them to more worthy objects" (15).

what Alcibiades learns about himself in this way is not about a true but impersonal self, but about characteristics that are all too individual and personal.[323] Nevertheless, Socrates allows Alcibiades to appreciate those characteristics by framing them in a larger context. For example, he gets Alcibiades to compare himself to the Persians and Spartans, whom the young man aspires to match. For Socrates, knowing your place means knowing both your limitations and, I would argue, your strengths and potential; knowing these, you know what your role should be. So, as Socrates tells Alcibiades near the end of the dialogue, "before one acquires virtue it's better to be ruled by somebody superior than to rule" (135b). It is better both for yourself and for those whom you propose to rule.[324]

3.5 So, then, how does the process Socrates is suggesting work? How do souls make contact with each other? At 130d-e, Socrates tells us: "You and I converse with each other using words as one soul to another. [...] Socrates converses with Alcibiades using words, not by addressing the words to his face, but to *Alcibiades*; and this is his soul" (d9-e5). According to this, souls make contact in dialogue. Just as a lover seeks to capture and hold the gaze of his beloved, so Socrates, the true lover of Alcibiades' soul, seeks to capture, hold, and reflect his beloved's soul, through conversation.

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[323] Gordon claims that Socrates alone can do this for Alcibiades because he alone knows and cares about Alcibiades well enough to be able to offer him a true reflection of himself (13, 15). This interpretation is attractive, but the problem is that Socrates appears to do the same thing for lots of characters besides his beloved Alcibiades. Arguably, Socrates' questions also give Euthyphro, Laches, Nicias, Polus, Callicles, and many others reflections of themselves. Either Socrates loves all of these characters (which, I suppose, is possible) or love is not required.

[324] So also, in the *Charmides*, when Socrates is considering the possibility that *sôphrosunê* is knowing what one knows and doesn't know, he imagines that, if we had this knowledge, every household and city would be well-governed, because no one would try to do what they do not understand, everyone would hand things over to those who have knowledge, and thus everything would be done correctly (171d-2a). A similar idea is at the heart of the guiding principle of the Kallipolis in the *Republic*, that each person should do his own work (which he understands) and not the work of others.

It is useful to compare the *Alcibiades* image to a similar image in Socrates' second speech about love in the *Phaedrus*. In that speech, Socrates describes how the sight of beauty nourishes the lover's soul. The image of godlike Beauty he sees in his beloved strikes him out of his senses; a "stream of beauty" pours into the lover and feeds his soul's wings, so that they begin to regrow (250d-251e). At first, this is a one-way interaction, but eventually, some of this beauty reflects back to the beloved boy:

> Think how a breeze or an echo bounces back from a smooth solid object to its source; that is how the stream of beauty goes back to the beautiful boy and sets him aflutter. It enters through his eyes, which are its natural route to the soul; there it waters the passages for the wings, starts the wings growing, and fills the soul of the loved one with love in return. Then the boy is in love, but has no idea what he loves. [...] He does not realize that he is seeing himself in the lover as in a mirror. (255c-d; trans. Nehamas and Woodruff)

The story told here is not quite the same as what we get in the *Alcibiades*. In this version, it is visible, *physical* beauty that nourishes souls; in the *Alcibiades*, by contrast, Socrates stresses the unimportance of the body. But notice that, in the *Phaedrus*, what the lover reflects is not his beloved's flaws—his ignorance, pretensions, and so on—but his beauty. The lover reflects back to his boy the very qualities that he sees and loves.

This element, I argue, is present in the *Alcibiades* image, as well, when Socrates claims that the soul that wants to know itself must look into the part of the soul that resembles God, because "someone looking into this and recognizing [*gnous*] all the divine, both God and wisdom, would in this way best recognize [*gnoiê*] himself as well" (133c5-6). The soul recognizes itself insofar as it recognizes that it, too, has something of the divine in itself, in having a share of understanding and wisdom. It sees *what sort of being* it is: a

human soul, limited in many ways, not itself a god, but also, through its kinship with God, possessing great potential to be something more.[325]

Seeing his reflection in the soul of an honest lover, therefore, the beloved sees his place in things—but not only his limitations, faults, and weaknesses. He also begins to recognize in himself a potential for greater things. Thus, he learns about himself as an individual by seeing himself as a part of something greater. And, if things go well, he'll desire to fulfill that potential. Why, he'll ask himself, am I loved? He'll see his value and aspire to earn his lover's regard. In this dialogue, Socrates tries to do this for Alcibiades. Just by loving him—loving his soul—Socrates makes him aware of his own potential for beauty and nobleness, if only he should make the effort to cultivate it.[326]

We might wonder, of course, how a dialectic conversation could teach so much. The analogy itself does not provide many details. As is often the case with Plato, we must infer what we can from what Socrates does. I've tried to do this in this chapter.

There is one more thing worth noticing about this analogy: It seems at least possible that the benefit gained would be reciprocal. After all, if you look into my eyes for your reflection, I can also see my own in your eyes. Perhaps the same is true with the communication between souls. At 124c-d, Socrates emphasizes that his soul needs *epimeleia* no less than Alcibiades'. It seems, then, that Socrates also needs someone to reflect his soul. Near the end of the dialogue, Alcibiades claims that, from now on, he will be like Socrates' lover, "We're probably going to be changing roles, Socrates. I'll be

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[325] Compare the image, near the end of the *Republic*, in which our souls are composed of three elements, two of which are beasts, one of which is like a human and has a share of the divine. The argument is that we fulfill our highest and best nature by nurturing and obeying this best part of ourselves (*Rep.* XI.588c ff.).
[326] Socrates affirms his love for Alcibiades' soul at 131c-e. This reassures Alcibiades, but it also challenges him to "make progress [*epi to beltion iêi*]" in order to be worthy of it (131d1-2).

playing yours and you'll be playing mine" (135d7-9). Socrates replies, "Then my love, my excellent friend, will differ in no way from a stork, if, after hatching winged love in you it is cared for [*therapeusetai*] by it in return" (135e1-3). Socrates expects that, if he succeeds in inculcating in Alcibiades a reciprocal love, he will himself be taken care of just as he is taking care of Alcibiades. One way to take *epimeleia* for yourself, then, might be to find a lover whom you can care for, who can take care of you in return. A true philosophical friendship might then be possible (see Ch. 3, §§ 5.1-5.2).

4. Socrates drives home his point

4.1 The soul-reflection image, vague though it might be, functions as the dramatic and philosophical focus of the dialogue. In the final section, Socrates seeks to drive home his point about the need to acquire self-knowledge and virtue, by producing two arguments about the consequences of entering politics without them. If you want to be happy, Socrates argues, you must first improve yourself and obtain virtue. Until you do, it is better to be ruled by a superior than to rule yourself (135b). These arguments underscore Socrates' initial point: Alcibiades cannot achieve what he wants without the virtue he can attain only with Socrates' help.

I'll start with the first argument, which is the more unusual and puzzling of the two: Socrates argues that, if a person doesn't know himself, he'll be unable to know his "belongings," either.[327] But then, not knowing his belongings, he won't be able know what belongs to his belongings, nor what belongs to other people or to the city. As a result, he'll

[327] "Belongings" may be something of an over-translation of the Greek that Socrates uses in this passage. Socrates uses simple possessives: "ours [*hêmetera*]," "Alcibiades' [*Alkibiadou*]," "his own [*hautou*]" (133c22, d1, e1). But it is difficult to translate these possessives into good English, especially when they are iterated, as in "*ta tôn heautou*" (e1-2). Keep in mind, therefore, that Socrates' language is perhaps more vague about the relation in question here than my translation might suggest.

make mistakes, manage public and private affairs badly, and make himself and anyone who comes under his power miserable (*athlios*) (134a). "Therefore," Socrates concludes, "it is impossible for someone to be happy, if he is not *sôphrôn* and good" (134a13-14).

In the course of this argument, Socrates makes a rather surprising claim, which I will call 'C3' for future reference. Socrates says to Alcibiades:

> We therefore did not quite agree correctly, when we agreed just now that there are some who do not know themselves, but who know their belongings [*ta hautôn*], and others who know what belongs to their belongings. For [C3] it seems to be the job of one man and one skill [*technês*] to know all these things: himself, his belongings, and what belongs to his belongings. (133d10-e2)

A few Stephanus pages earlier (at 131a-b), Socrates had suggested that doctors and trainers *do* know about what belongs to them (their bodies) and that farmers and other craftsmen (*dêmiourgoi*) know about what belongs to their bodies (food, clothing, etc.). But now, Socrates says, this has turned out to be incorrect, because in fact there is "one skill" that knows all these things. How is that? How does Socrates defend this claim, if he does?

4.2 The argument begins a few lines before the passage I quoted above. Socrates argues as follows:

> SOC: [P6] If we didn't know ourselves and were not *sôphrôn*, would we be able to know which of the things that belong to us were good and which bad?
> ALC: How could we know that, Socrates?
> SOC: [P7] No, for I suppose it would seem impossible to you for someone who does not know Alcibiades to know that what belongs to Alcibiades belongs to him.
> ALC: Quite impossible, by Zeus.
> SOC: [P8] And similarly we couldn't know that what belongs to us belongs to us, without knowing ourselves?
> ALC: How could we?

SOC: [P9] And if we didn't even know what belongs to us, how could we possibly know what belongs to our belongings?
ALC: We couldn't. (133c21-d9)

It is not entirely clear how this all fits together—for example, what role does P6 play? Is P7, which has the particle "*gar*" as its second word, supposed to provide support for P6? The main line of reasoning, however, seems straightforward enough. The basic idea is stated in P7: If someone doesn't "know" Alcibiades, Socrates says, she cannot know that, for example, this is Alcibiades' house. She must have some minimal knowledge of Alcibiades in order to refer to him in her thoughts and to connect him to the house.[328] Similarly, if I do not "know" myself (in some similarly minimal sense), I would not be able to know what's mine (P8), or what belongs to what's mine (P9). We might put this premise in a general form as follows:

P18. Person S can know of y that y belongs to x only if S (in some sense) knows x.

Now, P10 is plausible enough, at least when it comes to the example of Alcibiades that Socrates uses in P7. But there is a problem, one that becomes particularly pressing when applied to the case of self-knowledge. For we might ask, what sort of knowledge of x does a person *need* in order to know of y that y belongs to x? In the Alcibiades example, it does not seem the person needs to know much. In fact, she might know nothing more about Alcibiades than that he is the guy that owns this house. The question then becomes, how is it possible for anyone to lack this basic kind of knowledge of himself?

In order to answer this question, we have to remember what self-knowledge involves for Socrates. One simple reason that many people lack self-knowledge, according

[328] Cf. *Meno* 71b5-7: Socrates says that it is impossible "for someone who doesn't in any way know [*gignôskei*] who Meno is to know [*eidenai*] that he is good-looking [*kalos*] or wealthy or even well-born."

to Socrates, is that that they *misidentify* themselves. They do not correctly distinguish themselves from their bodies or from their possessions or reputations. Socrates makes this point at 128a ff., when Socrates tells Alcibiades that people often think that they are taking *epimeleia* for themselves when really they are not (128a). But, really, as Socrates argues at 129b-130c, a person's self is his soul—this is what we need to take *epimeleia* for and direct our attention to. Most people do not recognize this, and so they make serious mistakes. Before anyone can even get started with *epimeleia* for the self, Socrates says, he has to be learn correctly to distinguish his self from all of these other things.[329] Otherwise, his priorities will be all wrong, and he'll neglect his true self, his soul.

The point of P8 and P9 is that, once this initial mistake is made, it has consequences for how we classify the rest, as well. Suppose I believe that my self is my body. As I result, I'll be liable to form certain beliefs about what *kind* of thing I am (a bodily thing), about what is good and bad for me, and what belongs to me, given what sort of thing I am. I'll think that the care and preservation of my physical body is the most important thing, and I'll also believe that the things of the body (rings, clothes, etc.) are mine, and, correspondingly, I'll give them greater importance. But if I had realized that I was a soul, a very different sort of thing from my body, I may not have made these mistakes. Until I recognize that I am my soul, Socrates argues, I cannot begin to get the rest of it right, either.

Socrates argues that the same reasoning applies to our thinking about other people as well:

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[329] Socrates' word for "know" here is "*gignôskô,*" which often has the sense of "perceive," "recognize," or "distinguish" (LSJ, sv. "*gignôskô*"). Thus, the problem for most people is that they do not recognize or distinguish themselves.

SOC: And by the same account, it follows that [P11] anyone who doesn't know his own belongings probably [*pou*] won't know other people's belongings either.

ALC: Quite so.

SOC: And [P12] if he doesn't know other people's belongings, nor will he know what belongs to the city. (133e4-8)

Socrates hedges a bit on P11 ("*pou*"). Perhaps someone could fail to know himself but at the same time know others and correctly distinguish *their* selves from other things. But, given that humans are relevantly similar, it is much more likely that he'd make the same mistakes in both cases. That is, if he identifies himself with his body or reputation, he will probably identify others similarly. He'd make a slightly different, though analogous mistake with respect to the city and its possessions (P12). Having misidentified the citizens with, say, their bodies, he will misidentify the city with a collection of bodies, and the city's belongings with the things that belong to the citizens' bodies.[330] Such a person, Socrates says, would fail as a statesman or even a household manager, because his priorities would be all wrong (133e). He'd make mistakes, conduct himself badly, and be wretched [*athlios*]. Socrates concludes:

C4. S cannot be happy if S lacks self-knowledge. (134a13-14).

4.3 I think that the basic line that Socrates is advancing here is sketchy but plausible; at least, that is, if we grant a couple of claims that Socrates is taking for granted by this point. Socrates has argued, first of all, that a person is identical to a soul distinct from the body. He has also claimed that most people do not know this but are in fact radically in error, identifying themselves with their bodies or possibly something else. If that's true, and if this

[330] Cf. *Gorgias* 517b ff: The statesmen of the past provided for the reputation, power, and physical comfort of the city in acquiring an empire, with walls and ships to defend it. But they neglected what was really important, the souls of their citizens. See also *Apology* 36c-d.

error has the sort of consequences that I've suggested, C4 would seem to be true. Without at least enough self-knowledge to avoid this error and its consequences, no one can become happy.

Now, we might doubt whether people are really so badly off as Socrates claims. While it is true that most people do expend a great amount of their effort looking after their physical well-being, they do not seem generally to be more miserable because of it. The other question we might ask is, how much do you have to know about yourself in order to escape these problems and live well? If Alcibiades has been convinced by Socrates' argument about the soul, he might already know that he is his soul and not his body. Does he thereby have the self-knowledge he needs to be successful?

Clearly, there has to be more to self-knowledge than that. Suppose that I accept that I am my soul. But what kind of thing is the soul? What do souls in general need? What sorts of things "belong" to souls? What does my soul in particular need? There is much more to know; the identification of the self with the soul is just the first step in the process of self-examination and self-improvement. "Knowledge of the self," if it is to be the knowledge that makes it possible for us both to live well and to rule a state, has to involve (perhaps among other things) an understanding of the *nature* of the self.

This brings us back to C3—Socrates' claim that it is one *technê* that knows self, the belongings of the self, and the belongings of the belongings. This conclusion does not follow from P7-P9. At best, P7-P9 establish that the ability to distinguish the self is *necessary* in order to know that what belongs to you belongs to you, and so on. But they do not establish that this ability is *sufficient* for knowing what belongs to you. Suppose you know that you are your soul. But then, what belongs to souls? Does the body "belong" to

the soul? What is this "belonging" relation, anyway? Moreover, the way Socrates talks about this *technê* suggests that it knows more than how to *distinguish* self from belongings and so on.[331] This *technê* is compared to medicine, physical training, and farming, which were earlier presumed to understand and to know how to promote the good of their objects (see above, § 4.1).

4.4 If I am right about this, it may explain what Socrates means by P6, for which I've not otherwise found a role. (P6: "If we didn't know ourselves and were not *sôphrôn*, would we be able to know which of the things that belong to us were good and which bad?") Perhaps he is saying that self-knowledge or *sôphrosunê* makes it possible for us to know what is "good and bad" for the soul. (Indeed, if I am right to suggest that, for Socrates, the soul has a divine aspect, then what is good and bad for us will be whatever nurtures and harms the divine aspect of our soul.[332]) Perhaps, then, the *technê* referred to in C3 allows not only classification, but also proper use and management. If so, it is easy to see how this kind of skill would be necessary in order to be a good statesman or household manager or to live a happy life.

This *technê* or kind of knowledge is, of course, the same one that appears so often in Plato's dialogues (in *Laches, Charmides, Euthydemus,* and *Republic*, among others). Socrates does not always call it a *technê*, but the idea is the same: If one had a certain kind

[331] Socrates uses a different word for "know" at 133e1, "*katidein,*" which means "look down, observe."
[332] Scott (2000) writes, "Without this kind of self-knowledge that has discovered its likeness to the divine, which is also to say, without justice and *sôphrosunê*, it will be impossible to know what parts of ourselves are good and which parts are bad" (96). I think that Scott is generally right on this point, but he connects this idea to the soul-parts doctrine of the *Republic*. There is no evidence in this dialogue of a doctrine of parts of the soul. As Denyer points out, Socrates speaks only of the "region (*topos*)" of the soul where understanding occurs. (citation)

of knowledge or wisdom (perhaps the knowledge of good and evil), one would know what to do and how to use the materials of life, because one could see what was beneficial and what was not. The difference is that in this passage Socrates connects this knowledge explicitly to self-knowledge or *sôphrosunê*, whereas in other dialogues he is more vague.[333]

In the passage under consideration, however, Socrates does not spell any of this out. As so often happens, he says only as much as he needs to say to make his point. For the most part, he relies on the vague idea of "knowing" oneself and one's belongings. We don't know exactly what that means, but, at the least, it involves being able correctly to identify and distinguish self from other things (as the word *gignôskein* suggests). Does it involve more? Probably, but the form of the argument does not depend on specifying what that more is. The premises have the form, if S does not have knowledge K, S will not be able to ϕ. If K has feature F (say, knowing that one is one's soul), and S lacks F, the antecedent is satisfied. But suppose that Alcibiades objects that he *does* know that he is his soul and so has F. Socrates has the resources to extend the argument. He could show that K also has feature G (knowing what the soul is, what is good or bad for it), and, since Alcibiades lacks G, he still does not have what he needs to be happy. Thus the vagueness

[333] I would argue, tentatively, that the connection between self-knowledge and the skill at living is a much more pervasive theme in Plato's work than is often recognized. In the *Charmides*, Plato connects the two explicitly, though obscurely: Both "self-knowledge" and "the knowledge of good and evil" are considered as definitions of *sôphrosunê.* But I think the connection is made less explicitly in many other places: for example, in the *Republic*, the *technê* of ruling the city involves understanding—knowing--ourselves as human beings: knowing what we are, what needs we have, what parts our souls have, and what sort of society we should create, given these findings. Another example is in the *Phaedrus*: Socrates says, "I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that." Socrates goes on to specify the question: "Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?" (230a). In other words, what kind of thing am I? The *Phaedrus* goes on to explore this question. Therefore, I would argue that, contrary to Annas' claim that in Plato's later dialogues "his interest in self-knowledge lessens" (127), Plato continues to see the importance of the problem of self-knowledge, conceived correctly.

of the argument does not mean that Socrates does not have the resources to extend it if necessary.

4.5 In order to obtain happiness, then, a person needs to get *sôphrosunê*, not wealth (134b). Correspondingly, a city, in order to prosper, needs not walls or ships, but virtue. If Alcibiades is to manage the affairs of the city properly and well ("*orthôs kai kalôs*"), he must "impart virtue to the citizens" (134c). In order to do that, he must first have virtue himself.

At this point, Socrates supplements this argument with another, slightly different argument (134e-5a).[334] This second argument is similar to arguments I've discussed before.[335] The conclusion is stated at 134c10-12: "So what you need to get for yourself and for the city isn't political power [*archê*], nor the authority [*exousia*] to do what you like; what you need is justice and *sôphrosunê*." That is because, Socrates explains, when an individual or city "having no intelligence [*noun de mê echêi*]" has the authority to do what he or it wants, bad results inevitably follow (134e9). For example, a sick person "without medical insight [*noun iatrikon*] but with such a tyrant's power that nobody criticizes him" will ruin his health (135a1-5). He'll be able to do what he wants, but he won't know what to do and he'll do the wrong thing. Likewise, a person who is allowed to do what he wants on a ship when he has no skill in navigation will lead the ship and its crew to disaster.[336] The same thing, Socrates concludes, is in store for the person who obtains political power or—even worse—tyrannical authority (*turannis*, 135b3) before he obtains the knowledge and

[334] I am accepting the conjectural deletion of 134d1-e7.
[335] *Gorgias* 466b-8e, *Euthydemus* 281b-e.
[336] Cf. *Republic* VI.488a ff.

virtue he needs to do things well. Socrates here labels Alcibiades' ambition baldly—he wants *turannis*—and makes it clear that if he succeeds, the results will be disastrous.

Therefore, Socrates says, the first thing a person must do if he is to be successful and happy (*eudaimôn*) is to acquire virtue (specifically, *dikaiosunê* and *sôphrosunê*) (134d).[337] Then and only then should he lead. Once he is a leader, his job will be to make the citizens virtuous. Socrates tells Alcibiades that since he has not yet achieved virtue, he should leave politics to others, and Alcibiades agrees. Alcibiades asks Socrates for help.

5. Conclusion

Socrates' ultimate purpose in this dialogue is to change the direction of Alcibiades' life. This purpose unifies a dialogue that seems, in some ways, like a hodgepodge of unrelated episodes.[338] Alcibiades' passionate, vigorous nature—his *erôs*, if you will—gives him the potential to be a philosopher and live a great life. But to get him to fulfill that potential, Socrates must transform Alcibiades' motivations, so that he is driven not by ambition for tyrannical authority (*exousia, turannis*), achieved by political maneuvering, but rather by a desire to fulfill his higher nature and thereby to be *worthy* of ruling as a true superior. Socrates' efforts in the dialogue emphasize the difference between these two sorts of goals: between conventional and true justice; between the benefits gained through unjust means and the nobleness of courage; between power politics and the true rule of a

[337] Annas argues that *sôphrosunê* and *dikaiosunê* are connected for Plato here. Since *sôphrosunê* involves knowing your place, your "station and duties" in society, it naturally involves knowing also what you owe to others, in virtue of your social role (121-2).

[338] According to Gordon, one of the objections often leveled against the dialogue and offered as a reason for considering it spurious is its lack of a unifying theme. I agree with Gordon that this objection is off-base: I think the dialogue weaves together many different themes, for the purpose of constructing an effective protreptic.

superior; between mere agreement and true political harmony; and so on. Socrates tries to get Alcibiades to appreciate the emptiness of the one set of goals and the value of the other.

But the road that Socrates offers Alcibiades is long and difficult. The political power and international renown that Alcibiades wants is far away.[339] We can guess, as the dialogue comes to a close, that, in the end, Alcibiades won't take the offer. The city and its ways are too powerful an influence on Alcibiades (132a, 135e), too deeply entrenched in his way of thinking.[340] Moreover, from what Alcibiades says near the end of the dialogue, it doesn't seem that he's really understood the lesson. When Socrates asks him how he'll escape his present state of ignorance, Alcibiades replies, "It's up to you, Socrates" (135b). That is, he seems to think that, if he attends to Socrates, Socrates will teach him what he needs to know. In other words, Socrates will do the hard work. Alcibiades' story in the *Symposium* shows him making the same mistake: He offers himself sexually to Socrates, and he doesn't understand why Socrates turns him down (218c ff.). But that is not what Socrates was offering. Socrates' path requires hard work, and it requires a cooperative effort, where each party looks into the soul of the other and allows his own soul to be seen.

We know that Alcibiades won't follow Socrates. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades says that he is haunted by his failure: He knows he should change, but he cannot give up the political life to which he is so attached (216a ff.). The author of this dialogue, however, (whoever it might be) offers his readers the chance to make a different choice. The

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[339] See Scott: "If he were really astute, Alcibiades might ask Socrates how the focus upon his own betterment would prepare him for the political life rather than divert him from it" (92).

[340] Denyer notes signs of trouble even at the end of the dialogue, when Alcibiades proclaims his devotion to Socrates (135d): "Alcibiades cannot resist the opportunity for an ornamentally chiastic [...] arrangement of personal pronouns. [...] There is an ominous irony in the way that, even while professing his new allegiance to Socrates, Alcibiades resorts again to the prose style of sophistic oratory" (246).

philosophical life does not provide easy answers. But it is our only chance to make real progress, to gain the sort of self-knowledge we need.

Conclusion:

Philosophy as the Best Life for a Human Being

0. Introduction

I began this dissertation with some questions: What is Socrates' mission, as Plato represents it? What does he hope to accomplish, and how does he do it? And finally, why does he think that, through his mission, he provides the greatest benefit to his city and its citizens? I am now at a point where we can provide some answers to these questions. Of course, the answers that I give here are, to some extent, colored both by the dialogues that I've selected, and by the elements of those dialogues (Socrates' protreptic efforts) on which I've focused. Nevertheless, this project has shed light on an important aspect of Plato's philosophical work, one that so far has not received enough attention in the secondary literature. I will now summarize the results of my investigation and my answers to the questions about Socrates' mission. In particular, I will draw together some of the scattered ideas and arguments that I've worked with, so as to show what I take to be Plato's argument that the philosophical, examined life is the best life available for human beings. How and to what extent can Plato make good on Socrates' strong claims about the philosophical life in the *Apology*? I also show how this line of reasoning fits into the broader context of

Plato's thought. But in addition to giving my analysis of Plato's reasoning, I also evaluate it. How convincing is Plato's argument here? Should we agree?

1. The general pattern of Socratic protreptic

1.1 All three of the protreptic passages I looked at, in the *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, and *Alcibiades*, exhibit a similar pattern. In each of these dialogues, Socrates seeks first to engage his young interlocutors' interest in the pursuit of wisdom, and then to lead them to see how philosophy is done.

Socrates begins by identifying and engaging motivations that are central to each interlocutor's character, things about which the interlocutor cares deeply. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates appeals to Clinias' desire for happiness. This is the most generic and least specific motivation that Socrates uses—as he says, everyone wants to live well and be happy (278e). Indeed, Plato does very little to develop Clinias as a distinctive character. All we know about him is that he comes from a noble family (275a-b), and that he has many lovers, including Ctesippus (274b-c). In this respect, he could be any noble youth trying to decide what to do with his life. Socrates' main interlocutors in the *Lysis* and *Alcibiades* have more distinctive personalities, and Socrates' strategy with them is consequently more targeted. In the former, we quickly learn about Lysis's relationship with his parents, his fondness for eristic argument, and his competitive relationship with his friend, Menexenus (207b-e). Socrates employs these motivations first to draw the boy into a conversation (even using Menexenus and the promise of conversation as lures to entice Lysis to leave his other friends and join them (206d-7b)), then to interest him in what Socrates has to say. As I've explained, Socrates' arguments are designed to engage the

motivations that Socrates perceives in Lysis (see esp. Ch. 3, § 3.3). Socrates treats Menexenus similarly, to a lesser extent (§ 4.2). Finally, in the *Alcibiades*, Socrates gets Alcibiades' attention through the young man's powerful ambition and desire for power and reputation (see *Alcibiades* 105a-e).

As Socrates explains in the *Lysis*, he has one talent: He can recognize lovers and the objects of their love (204b8-c2). This talent enables him to identify and use the most important elements of his interlocutors' motivational sets, so that he might get them to live better lives (see Ch. 3, § 1.3).

The approach that Socrates takes with these young interlocutors differs somewhat from the approach he takes in some dialogues where he talks to older characters. For example, in the *Ion, Euthyphro, Laches, Hippias Major* and *Minor, Gorgias,* and *Protagoras*, Socrates talks to older men who believe that they are experts in their fields. Euthyphro thinks that he is an expert on piety; Laches and Nicias are seasoned generals and therefore believe that they understand courage; and so on. When Socrates talks to these characters, he begins from their supposed area of expertise. He asks them to explain what they know, purportedly so that he can learn from them, but also, as we know, so he can examine their knowledge claims and, when he finds them lacking, show them that they do not know what they think they do (see Ch. 1, § 1.2).[341] But, whatever approaches Socrates takes, his purpose is similar. He is putting his interlocutors' lives to the test.[342] The difference is that the older characters' lives revolve mostly around their

[341] Socrates' encounter with Alcibiades is actually something of a hybrid between these two patterns: He gets Alcibiades' attention by playing on his ambition, but then he asks Alcibiades to explain his area of expertise (106c ff.). Alcibiades proves not *have* a particular area of expertise on which he could speak, as Socrates shows. See also Socrates' remarks to Menexenus at *Lysis* 211d-212b.

[342] See *Laches* 187e-188b. On the topic of Socrates putting people's lives to the test, see Teloh (1986), Ch. 1; Vlastos (1994a); Brickhouse and Smith (2002); Goldman (2004).

accomplishments and the credentials that they have accumulated, which support their places in the community. Euthyphro, for example, bases his life and his occupation on his supposed knowledge of piety; so also do Laches, Gorgias, and Hippias. The younger characters, on the other hand, do not have such a basis of accomplishment or knowledge on which they could rely. Their lives revolve more around their hopes for the future, their talents, or the standing and wealth of their families. In their own way, however, they too are confident in themselves and complacent about what they need to do.

As he does with the older characters, Socrates seeks to undermine this confidence and complacency. Each of the young men seems to believe that he'll be able to achieve what he desires without much effort. Clinias accepts the conventional view that happiness consists in having many good things, provided by good fortune (see Ch. 2, §§ 1.1).[343] Moreover, given his noble family and good looks (see *Euthydemus* 271b), he's bound to suppose that *he* is one of the lucky ones, and that happiness will therefore come to him. Socrates shows him that, on the contrary, this kind of good fortune is not sufficient, and that his assets will actually do him more harm than good if he does not become wise (281b-e). Lysis seems to have a view similar to Clinias'. He believes that he'll be given everything he needs to be happy (chariots, wealth, etc.) when he comes of age (*Lysis* 209a). He trusts that when he is young his parents will take care of him, and when he is older they will turn the family estate over to him and he'll be happy. In a complicated argument, Socrates shows the boy that it is not reaching a set number of years that will give him what he wants,

[343] I have some reservations about saying this, since it isn't clear that Clinias strongly believes the claims Socrates puts forward about happiness. He goes along with them, but he is not putting them forward as his own ideas. It is for this reason that Vlastos (1994a) denied that the *Euthydemus* (and the *Lysis*, for that matter) is an elenctic dialogue. Socrates seems to be supplying the views being considered, rather than the interlocutor. On the other hand, Clinias does agree. What better evidence do we have of what a character believes, except what he says or agrees to in the text?

but wisdom. He then encourages Lysis to make the same argument to his friend, Menexenus.

As we saw, it is Alcibiades whose confidence Socrates finds it most difficult to shake. Alcibiades' overweening ambition is matched by such a deep confidence in his abilities that he has come to believe that, despite his youth, he does not need help from anyone. He has rejected suitors, ignored Pericles, and resisted anyone who told him that he needed help (103b-104b; 118e). Socrates pokes some holes in this confidence and shows Alcibiades his limitations. However, at the same time as Socrates tries to lower Alcibiades' estimation of himself, he also tries to raise Alcibiades' expectations (Ch. 4, §§ 1.1, 2.1). Socrates seeks to give Alcibiades a higher purpose for his life than political maneuvering—that of ruling the *polis* as its rightful superior, imparting virtue and order among his fellow citizens. This aspect of Socrates' approach—seeking to give his interlocutors a clearer sense of their own deepest desires and of what they might achieve—is clearest in the *Alcibiades*, but I would argue that it is present in the other two dialogues, as well. In the second protreptic conversation with Clinias, it turns out that the wisdom necessary for happiness is the "statesman's and the king's craft [*hê politikê kai hê basilikê technê*]," which is "the cause of correct action in the state and [...] sits alone at the helm of the state, governing all things, ruling all things to make all things useful" (*Euthydemus* 291c-d). At this point in the dialogue, Socrates is summarizing the argument for Crito, so it is not clear how Socrates and Clinias were led to this conclusion. But, once again, it turns out that the knowledge a person needs to be happy in his own life is the same as the knowledge he needs to lead a state. Similarly, in the *Lysis*, Socrates leads Lysis to desire not only to inherit his father's estate, but also to control other people's affairs as well, even those of the

Great King of Persia. Socrates suggests that if a person should become wise, *everyone* would turn things over to him to rule and control (210a-b).[344]

Now, it is not obvious why political power is so attractive to these boys, since, as Socrates points out in the *Republic*, a good ruler, who brings order and happiness to his subjects, is a servant to his city.[345] But it is clear from these passages that Plato sees a close connection between at least the *desire* for a good life and the *desire* to rule. Lysis and Alcibiades, in particular, *want* to possess the freedom and control that they believe comes from being in power. Socrates seeks to channel their ambitions in healthier and more worthwhile directions—in the short term at least, into the love of wisdom.

Socrates therefore undermines his young interlocutors' confidence that they can achieve their desires partly by casting doubt on their current qualifications, and partly by showing them the greater goals they might achieve. In this process, he channels their desires into a desire for wisdom. Wisdom, Socrates argues, is what they need in order to

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[344] Besides these passages, Socrates also connects the knowledge that enables a person to live well with the knowledge that enables him to rule the *polis* in the *Charmides* (171d ff.), where Socrates suggests a connection between *sôphrosunê,* knowledge of good and evil, and the knowledge that would make cities well-governed; and *Gorgias* (503c ff.), where Socrates describes a craft that determines what appetites to satisfy so as to promote order and organization in the soul—a craft he faults the great Athenian leaders for lacking. In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras claims to teach "good deliberation [*euboulia*]" in both domestic matters and in public affairs (318e-9a). So Protagoras also connects good deliberation in one's private affairs with good deliberation in the political arena.

[345] See, e.g., *Republic* 1.342e. It seems to me that Plato has conflicting attitudes about political rule, even within the *Republic*. On the one hand, Socrates sometimes claims that no one would want to rule the city, if he did not have to. Once he's escaped the Cave, Socrates says, the philosopher does not really want to go back. He wants to stay and contemplate the Forms without interruption, and he takes his turn at ruling only because it is compulsory and he has to pay back his city for the education he's been given (7.519d ff.; see also *Phaedo* 65a-67b, on the distractions of the body and the physical world). Socrates asks Glaucon, "Can you name any life that despises political rule besides that of the true philosopher?" (521b). But, on the other hand, there is also a strong attraction in being a ruler. A ruler has a chance to bring order to his city, to make it so that the Good, Justice, and Beauty are instantiated in the world. (See, e.g., *Rep.* 7.540d-e: The true philosophers "regard justice as the most important and essential thing, serving it and increasing it as they set the city in order." Similarly, in the *Symposium*, Diotima says that all people have a fundamental drive to reproduce and give birth in Beauty (206c ff.)). This all comes down to a question to which I believe Plato did not know the answer: Which is better, undisturbed contemplation of transcendent reality, or the active production of greater Beauty and Goodness in this world?

get what they want. The way that Socrates arrives at this conclusion and the claims that he makes about wisdom are different in each case. In the *Euthydemus*, he characterizes wisdom as a skill (*technê*) that knows how both to produce and to use correctly what it produces (289b-c). None of the other assets (T2 items) that we might have, Socrates argues, do us any good unless we have the wisdom to use them correctly and beneficially. Socrates' emphasis in the *Lysis* is different. There, Socrates argues that no one will trust Lysis or allow him to do what he wants unless he becomes wise. But presumably, Socrates' point is the same. People will not entrust their affairs to Lysis because, unless he is wise, he won't be able to put them to good use. Lysis will not be granted the freedom he wants, Socrates implies, until he has the wisdom to use it correctly. Socrates does not spell this out clearly in his arguments in the *Lysis*; the closest he gets is in what I called the grand conclusion (210b-c), when he says that in the areas where we do not have knowledge "things will be alien to us [*hemin ... allotria*] because we will in no way benefit from them" (210c3-4; see Ch. 3, § 2.4). Finally, in the *Alcibiades*, Socrates gives a more specific characterization of the wisdom we need, as well as further reasons why we need it in order to be successful. The wisdom we need is self-knowledge, which is identical to *sôphrosunê* and justice (131b; 133c-134c). But there is some indication here, as well, that self-knowledge is valuable because it shows us how to avoid mistakes and use things correctly (117d-e; 134a; see Ch. 4, §§ 1.6, 4.2-4.4).[346]

It is worth noting that, of these three dialogues, the *Alcibiades* is the only one that explicitly connects wisdom with other virtues, and even there, Socrates does not so much

[346] Below, in § 2.2, I discuss the plausibility of this line of argument. Has Socrates succeeded in showing, for example, that wisdom is necessary for happiness?

argue for the connection as assert it. The connection is perhaps suggested when Socrates says that the kingly art is the one that will make men wise *and* good (*Euthydemus* 292c).[347] But, for the most part, Socrates focuses on convincing his interlocutors that they need *wisdom*, and, indeed, it is not obvious from what he says that he has *moral* wisdom in mind. Even in the *Alcibiades*, the focus is on finding out how to take *epimeleia* for and improve *ourselves*. It only so happens that, because humans are similar, the same knowledge enables us to take *epimeleia* for others, as well.

The final element in common among these three dialogues is that, in each case, Socrates ends by drawing his interlocutors into a (more or less) cooperative philosophical inquiry, what in the *Alcibiades* he calls a "*koinê boulê*" (124b). At some point in each dialogue, the tone changes. Before this point, Socrates is giving each youth a lesson.[348] But once the youths have understood the point that Socrates is trying to make (e.g., that they need wisdom if they are to get what they desire), each becomes, at least formally, Socrates' partner in a philosophical search.[349] Socrates professes that he is as ignorant as they are,

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[347] Socrates defends the connection between wisdom and virtue (*aretê*) more fully in other places. Some arguments to this effect can be discerned in the *Laches, Charmides*, and *Euthyphro*, where, while searching for the definitions of virtues, Socrates eventually arrives at the suggestion that they are some kind of knowledge. But more direct arguments are made in the *Protagoras* (esp. 352c-9e) and *Meno* (87c-9a).

[348] He might not want to describe what he is doing in these terms. See *Apology* 33b: "I never promised to teach them anything and have not done so. If anyone says that he has learned anything privately that the others did not hear, be assured that he is not telling the truth." According to the hidden expert interpretation (see Introduction, § 1.1), when Socrates denies teaching, he is being ironic: He *is* teaching, in a way, but he does not want to be seen as an authority whose word is taken as authoritative. In these passages, however, Socrates makes no secret about his intentions. In at least the *Euthydemus* and *Alcibiades*, his interlocutors are well aware that he is trying to change their minds about something. Socrates clearly has in mind a result that he is trying to bring about. But there is a big difference between what Socrates is trying to convince them to accept and the knowledge that the hidden expert interpretation ascribes to Socrates. Socrates is trying to convince them that they need knowledge—what the content of that knowledge is, he evidently does not know (thus the second protreptic discussion in the *Euthydemus*). But according to the hidden expert interpretation, he *does* have this knowledge; he is just not telling. All of the evidence I have reviewed strongly suggests that this is false.

[349] As I've pointed out, Clinias and Alcibiades take much bigger parts in the investigations than do Lysis or Menexenus. Remember, Clinias even seems to take the lead at one point (see Ch. 2, § 5.2).

and he has them join him in seeking the wisdom that they all need and lack. The investigations all end inconclusively.[350] But the search gives Socrates a chance to show the boys how a philosophical investigation is done and perhaps to interest them in continuing to practice philosophy.

1.2 The pattern I've discovered in these dialogues fits what I said about Socrates' mission in my first chapter, when I discussed the *Apology*. In that chapter, I argued that Socrates' mission contains three components: examination, showing or refutation, and exhortation. Socrates examines people to see if they know what they claim to know. His purpose in doing this seems to be to interpret and verify the Oracle, which said that no one was wiser than he.[351] But when he shows people their ignorance and exhorts them to change their lives, it is at least partly for their benefit. Socrates believes that a person who is ignorant about the most important things, like virtue and happiness, will not be able to live well. Such a person will exert his efforts and attention toward the wrong things, like his wealth and reputation, while neglecting what is most important, the state of his soul.

The dialogues that I've discussed emphasize how important it is to recognize one's ignorance and to try to remediate it. Socrates explains the problem to Alcibiades as follows:

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[350] Unlike with Clinias, Lysis, and Menexenus, Socrates' conversation with Alcibiades does not end with an *aporia*. There is a sort of *aporia* at the end of the investigation of the knowledge that good men have, when Alcibiades cannot reconcile his different ideas about political order (at 127d). But the last series of arguments does not end in this way. Nevertheless, the upshot of Socrates' final arguments is that he and Alcibiades have a lot of work to do. They haven't discovered detailed answers to their questions about the self or what a political leader knows. They've only worked out a (very vague) program for how they can proceed with the investigation in the future (i.e., the mirror analogy), and they've demonstrated that they need to pursue this program if they are to get what they desire.

[351] See Ch. 1, § 1.2.

S: Don't you realize that mistakes in action are caused by this kind of ignorance, of thinking that we know when we don't know?

A: What do you mean by that?

S: I suppose we set out to act only when we think we know what we're doing, right?

A: Yes.

S: But when people don't think they know, they hand it over to others, right?

A: Of course.

S: So the sort of people who don't think they know live without mistakes, because they turn things over to other people.

A: Yes.

S: Well, who are the ones who make mistakes? Surely not the ones who know?

A: Of course not.

S: Well, since it's not those who know, and it's not those who don't know and know they don't know, is there anyone left except those who don't know but think they do know?

A: No, they're the only ones left.

S: Therefore this is the ignorance that is the cause of bad things and the most reproach-worthy [*eponeidistos*] sort of stupidity.

A: Yes.

S: And isn't it most harmful and most shameful when it is ignorance of the most important things?

A: Very much so. (*Alcibiades* 117d8-118a10)

Ignorance of one's own ignorance is the most reproach-worthy (cf. *Apology* 29b) and the cause of bad things for people because when we think that we know what we do not, we make mistakes. It is much better for us to recognize our ignorance, leave things alone, and hand them over to others. Socrates therefore helps his fellow citizens when he shows them their ignorance. They are not always willing to see, but Socrates does his best to show them.

Plato often has Socrates make the point he does here, that once we recognize our ignorance in an area, we should leave things alone and turn them over to others to deal with (see also *Euthydemus* 281b-c, *Gorgias* 466e, *Alcibiades* 133d-134a, *Charmides* 117d-e, *Sophist* 229c). This is good advice when there are experts around to whom we can turn.

(For example, since I know nothing about plumbing, I should not try to fix my own plumbing; I should call a plumber.) But what do we do if there are no experts available, but we must make a choice anyway?[352] Many of the difficult choices that we face are of this sort. Something needs to be done (e.g., a political decision needs to be made, or a person has to choose the course of his life) but no one has the requisite expertise. Socrates' advice is not (obviously) helpful in these cases.

Even so, Socrates' point about importance of recognizing one's ignorance stands. If we fail to recognize that we are ignorant about the "most important" matters in life, it will be almost impossible to live well, especially if, as Socrates argues, most people's beliefs about what is valuable and important are radically wrong. We would be at risk of ruining our lives by wasting our efforts on things that aren't important (wealth, reputation, etc.), all the while ignoring the things that really matter (like the state of our souls).

But, at the same time, decisions must be made; life must be lived. Therefore, Socrates' advice, that we should leave things alone and hand them over to others, does not seem sufficient. That is why I have argued that if Socrates is really to benefit his fellow-citizens, his mission cannot end when he shows people that they are ignorant (cf. Ch. 1, §§ 4.2-3). For what are they to do then? They must make choices; *somebody* has to govern the state. It's good that they see that they are ignorant, but then they need some way of proceeding and coping with their situation and with their lives.

The evidence that I've surveyed from the dialogues indicates that Plato recognized this problem. In fact, Socrates does not stop once he's showed people that they are ignorant. In the *Apology*, he claims also to exhort his fellow citizens to live better lives and

[352] See Denyer (2001), p. 157, s.v. 117d8-9.

to tend to themselves, to take *epimeleia* for their souls and for virtue. In Chapter 1, I argued that he is trying to get them not only to adopt an attitude of concern, but also to take active steps toward improving and taking care of themselves and coming to a better understanding of virtue.

When we look at Socrates in action in the protreptic passages, we see that his exhortation has two elements. First, he seeks to engage his young interlocutors' motivations, to *turn* their desires *toward* wisdom.[353] He persuades them that they need wisdom if they are to get what they desire, so that they want to pursue wisdom. (One way that he does this, as I argued above, is to get them to aspire to goals that *require* wisdom and self-improvement. Lysis and Alcibiades will earn greater responsibility and authority only if they become worthy of it, by becoming wiser.) That is, he seeks to make them philosophers in the literal sense, *lovers* of wisdom. But he also turns them toward philosophy in a second way: He shows them how actually to *practice* philosophy. A mere desire for wisdom is not sufficient for the *epimeleia* that he wants people to take. Taking *epimeleia* for oneself and for virtue is something that one *does*; philosophizing is an activity, one that Socrates exemplifies for his young friends and for the readers of Plato's dialogues. It is not an easy activity, nor one that even Socrates fully understands (see below, § 2.2). But it is a crucial one if we hope to make progress toward the wisdom we need in order to live well.

[353] Socrates' word for exhortation in the *Apology* is *parakeleuomai* (see, e.g., 29d5); in the *Euthydemus*, on the other hand, he describes what he is doing as a demonstration of "*hê protreptikê sophia*" (278c5-6). The idea is the same in both cases, but *protreptikê* has the literal sense of turning someone toward something. In the *Republic*, Socrates says that education is "the craft concerned with this very thing, this turning around [*periagôgês*], and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it" (7.518d).

1.3 The dialogues show Socrates at work, pursuing his mission and the life that he believes to be the best. Ultimately, it is the readers of the dialogues that are Plato's actual audience. The dialogues operate on the readers in ways that are analogous to how Socrates operates on his interlocutors. They show us things that we do not know. They appeal to our desire to live well, our curiosity, and, in some cases, our love for puzzles and arguments. And, in these dialogues, Plato has Socrates and other characters present some of the most important and difficult problems that we face, suggesting tools for beginning to think about these problems.

That is not to say that we interact with dialogues on the same level or in exactly the same ways that the interlocutors interact with Socrates. We have some advantages that the interlocutors do not, as I've mentioned before. We can draw on a history of philosophical discussion about these issues. We can step back from the action and think critically about the things that the characters do and say, the arguments that they make. Nevertheless, as I've tried to show, there are important similarities between the responses Socrates elicits from his interlocutors and the responses the dialogues elicit from us. When Socrates makes the case to Clinias that wisdom is necessary for happiness, Plato also directs the argument at his readers. The argument demands careful thought. Having evaluated the argument and its strengths and weaknesses, we may be convinced, like Clinias. Or we may respond with arguments of our own. Either way, Plato will have achieved his purpose, drawing us into his inquiry into these important questions.

An objection is sometimes made to my interpretation: If we recognize what Plato is doing and we realize that he is trying to turn us toward philosophy, won't he fail? We will see that we are being manipulated, and we'll resist. But I don't see why we should do that.

Plato is not compelling his readers to do something that they do not want to do. He is inviting us into the search, by drawing on our deepest motivations and showing us that achieving the goals we really and deeply care about depends on our recognizing our ignorance and thinking about the problems he poses. If we did not really care about these goals and did not share these values, we would not accept the invitation.

2. Philosophy as the best life for a human being

2.1 In the *Apology*, Socrates claims, "This really is the greatest good for a human being, to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being" (38a2-6). Socrates here claims that living as he does—that is, practicing philosophy, discussing virtue and other ethical matters—is the greatest good for a human being. Indeed, Socrates' belief in the value of the examined life is part of what, on my interpretation, drives him to try to engage others in this life. But this claim about the value of the philosophical life is a strong one, and one of the things I wanted to do in this dissertation was to see how and to what extent Plato could make good on it. I am now in a position to outline what I take to be one line of reasoning that Plato deploys in favor of this contention. That is not to say that this is Plato's only or even Plato's best argument. But it is the argument that I have found outlined in the passages—in the *Euthydemus, Lysis*, and *Alcibiades*—where Socrates tries to convince others to take up the philosophical life.

In the protreptic passages that I have studied, Plato has Socrates (more or less explicitly) advances a series of claims, which together entail that a human being lives the best life available to him when he practices philosophy. The basic problem we humans

face, as Socrates explains in the *Apology,* is that we are ignorant about many of the most important matters in life (23a-b). In particular, we know very little that is specific or practical about many important ethical questions. We do not know what constitutes happiness; how to get it; nor even how to find the answers we seek. But, according to Socrates, ethical knowledge or wisdom is necessary for us to live the happiest life. So how are we to proceed? Plato's view, I contend, is that philosophy offers a way for humans to live the best life available to us, given our situation.

My interpretation differs from the more extreme versions of the hidden expert interpretations I discussed in the Introduction, because although I maintain that Socrates defends some substantive ethical claims, I deny that these claims are "hidden." They are not unstated answers to questions to which he professes not to know the answers. Socrates is open and honest about what he believes and about his mission. Nor do the claims constitute a substantive ethical theory—Socrates is not an "expert" because he believes them. As Kraut puts it, Socrates is far from having "a substantial theory [...] that tells us how to decide all practical questions" (282). On the contrary, in this argument, Socrates may be arguing that we need to search for such a theory.

In what follows, I first lay out the argument, briefly explaining Plato's reasons for accepting its premises. Then, I consider the plausibility of the argument. To what extent has Plato *succeeded* in defending Socrates' claim that philosophy is the best life for a human being? In what ways does his argument fall short?

2.2 The argument is as follows:

1. *Every human being desires some measure of happiness (*eudaimonia, to eu prattein*).*

In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates takes it as obvious that humans desire happiness (278e; see also *Symposium* 204e-205a; *Meno* 78a; *Rep.* 6.505d-e). But the challenge is to say what precisely happiness *is*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle describes the problem as follows:

> Both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that [the goal of human life] is happiness [*eudaimonia*] and identify living well with happiness; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. (*Nic. Ethics* 1.4)

According to Aristotle, happiness is the goal of all human activity; Plato often seems to agree. The best life for a human being is the life that best produces or constitutes his happiness. But then, the question becomes, how are we to achieve happiness? In this respect, Plato stands at the beginning of the long eudaimonist tradition in Greek ethics.[354]

2. *Ethical wisdom (*sophia*) is necessary for complete happiness.*

Socrates defends (2) perhaps most prominently in the *Euthydemus* (see Ch. 2, §§ 2.1-2.2). But he makes similar arguments or claims in the *Lysis* (209c-210c), *Alcibiades* (133d-134a), *Gorgias* (466e), *Charmides* (173a-174c), *Protagoras* (352c-356e), and *Meno* (87e-88e). The upshot of these passages is this: If a person has knowledge or wisdom (of a certain kind), he is able to act correctly, avoid mistakes, and put whatever assets he has to beneficial use. But without ethical wisdom, he will make mistakes and become miserable, unless he is careful and has the sense to leave alone things he does not understand (see

[354] For more on eudaimonism in Greek ethics, see Striker (1996), esp. p. 171, and Annas (1993b), § 1.1. Irwin (1995), §§ 36-7, 52-55, and Annas (1999), Ch. 1, argue, successfully I believe, that Plato's ethical approach fits into the eudaimonist tradition.

above, § 1.2). So without the wisdom consistently to act correctly, no one can become completely happy.

In the passages listed above, Plato has Socrates characterize the ethical wisdom necessary for happiness in various ways. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates models the wisdom necessary for happiness on crafts (*technai*) like carpentry and utensil-making. But he also recognizes that ethical wisdom differs in important ways from crafts like these, since, as he tells Clinias, ethical wisdom must know not only how to *make* things, but also how to *use them.* Craft-products like shoes and wealth are useless if they aren't put to good and beneficial use by the right sort of wisdom (see *Euthydemus* 289a ff.; cf. also *Republic* 4.428b-d). In other dialogues, Socrates describes ethical wisdom as "knowledge of good and evil" (*Charmides* 174a-c; *Laches* 199c-e; see also *Republic* 6.505a-c). Understanding good and evil, we can successfully pursue good and avoid evil. Or, as Socrates puts it in the *Protagoras*, our "salvation in life" lies in being able to recognize and correctly measure the good things that constitute a good and happy life (356d).

3. But no human being has ethical wisdom.

In the *Apology*, Socrates says, "I knew well that I knew nothing worthy of mention" (22c9-d1), and he claims he's discovered no one else who knows more about the most important matters than he does. He concludes that "human wisdom is worth little or nothing" and that the highest human wisdom is to be aware, as he is, of one's own ignorance (23a-b). According to the story in the *Apology*, Socrates' evidence for (3) is inductive: Throughout his life, he's searched out and examined everyone who thought himself to be wise. He's also approached and tested the wisest of the supposed teachers of virtue (as we see in the *Protagoras*, *Hippias Major* and *Minor*, and *Euthydemus*). He's found them all lacking.

He concludes, reasonably enough, that no human has or can teach the wisdom necessary for happiness, and that only the god is truly wise. (So also *Meno* 89e: "I have often tried to find out whether there were any teachers of [virtue], but in spite of all of my efforts I cannot find any.")

What does it mean to say that humans are ignorant of the "most important things"? (22c7). It means that humans do not know how to use the materials of life, do not know what happiness is, and consequently cannot consistently or reliably avoid making mistakes when they act. In the *Alcibiades*, Socrates suggests, in addition, that most people do not even know *what* they are. Many incorrectly identify themselves with their bodies or possessions, not recognizing that they are really their souls, and even those who avoid this mistake still do not know what sort of thing a soul *is*, or how it is improved or harmed (see Ch. 4, §§ 3.3, 4.3-4.4).

4. *Therefore, no human being achieves complete happiness.* (from 2 and 3)

Since no human has complete ethical wisdom, it follows that no human can entirely avoid making mistakes and bad choices. Indeed, even if we take Socrates' advice and refrain from acting in areas where we are ignorant, we will still not do as well as we might have done.[355] On this view, complete happiness, like complete ethical wisdom, is possessed by the gods alone. Given this result, however, we face a problem: How are we to live our lives and make the choices we need to make, if the wisdom we need for complete happiness is out of our reach? The second part of the argument provides an answer.

[355] See Woodruff (2007) for the claim that Socrates fell short of courage, insofar as he "has too thin of a notion of what is incumbent on him to do." Woodruff explains, "In the absence of knowledge Socrates seems to have an adequate procedure for which actions NOT to take. But he has no good way of deciding which actions he should take on" (9).

5. The pursuit of wisdom is necessary and sufficient to achieve human *happiness (i.e., whatever happiness a human being can achieve).*
6. The practice of philosophy (philosophia) *is the pursuit of wisdom.*

Socrates' mission is to convince his fellow citizens that, even though they are ignorant, they nevertheless *can* improve themselves and live better lives through their own effort and attention. In other words, they can take *epimeleia* for themselves. In particular, they can work to ensure that their ethical choices are as reasonable and as likely to be correct as they can make them. The way to do this, according to Socrates, is to pursue wisdom, or to practice philosophy. A philosopher is a lover of wisdom, who recognizes that she lacks ethical wisdom, desires to achieve it, and so takes steps to pursue it (see *Lysis* 218a-b; *Symposium* 200a-b, 204a-b). Even though she does not, in her human life, achieve complete ethical wisdom or happiness, the philosophical search nevertheless enables her to live the best life she can, given the circumstances she finds herself in.

It is important to note, however, that the term 'philosophy' in premise (6) refers to *whatever* activities get us closer to wisdom and enable a person to make better decisions. Philosophy consists of whatever activities *in fact* pursue wisdom and thus happiness. That means that, at this level, 'philosophy' does not refer to a specific set of activities. So the argument is not claiming (so far) that we should read the great works of the Western philosophical canon or take all of the philosophy courses we can take—because that might not actually be the way to pursue wisdom. It might turn out that the best way for a human to pursue wisdom is through Zen meditation. If a method we've been using turns out not to work, that method was not a part of philosophy after all.[356]

[356] Annas (1993b) argues that the modern conception of happiness is more rigid than the Greek notion of *eudaimonia* that lies at the heart of ancient ethical theory (453). Our notion of happiness is "bound to the

In Plato's dialogues, Socrates is depicted as having gotten a start in philosophy. For whatever reason, Socrates realized early in his life what most people do not, that he lacks ethical wisdom. Somehow (perhaps because of the Oracle), he formulated the idea of a quest for wisdom and discovered some methods for pursuing it. One important thing he discovered is how crucial it is for people to recognize their ignorance. Recognizing one's ignorance is important for many reasons—because it gives us a humility the gods value in humans, because it helps us avoid mistakes, and because it makes us desire and hopefully work to make ourselves better. Socrates therefore tries to preserve his own human wisdom, and he has done his best to show others their ignorance, as well.[357] In this way, philosophy maintains a sense of our limits as human beings.[358]

In addition, most commentators agree that, through his investigations, Socrates has also formulated many important positive ethical beliefs. For example, he believes that it is shameful to disobey a superior (*Apology* 28b), that one should never do wrong in return for wrong (*Crito* 49d), and that it is worse to commit injustice than to suffer it (*Gorgias* 469c). Commentators disagree about the status of these beliefs, how Socrates came to hold them, and how he would support them.[359] I do not have anything more to say about the interpretive problem of Socratic knowledge and ignorance here. My point is merely that Socrates *has* evidently developed some ways of coming to what he takes to be reasonable

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notions of felt pleasure and experienced satisfaction," whereas the Greek notion "is to be taken as an unspecific concept, capable of far more by way of revision than our notion of happiness is." I think that something similar can be said about the notion of philosophy in Plato's dialogues. Philosophy is defined more by its functional role than by a definitive set of practices or problems. One might argue, of course, that not too much has changed since Plato, except perhaps the functional role that philosophy is thought to play.

[357] In *Apology* 38a, cited above, Socrates says that he examines himself. An amusing reference to Socrates' self-examination occurs in the *Hippias Major*, where Socrates presses Hippias for answers by claiming that if he (Socrates) does not understand things adequately, "Sophroniscus' son"—that is, Socrates himself—won't let him off of the hook, "any more than he'd let me talk as if I knew what I didn't know" (298c).

[358] See Brickhouse and Smith (2000), 91-2.

[359] I discussed this problem in Ch. 1, § 4.3.

beliefs about important ethical matters and tools for thinking about ethical problems. The best evidence for this comes in the *Crito*, when Socrates is deciding whether to escape from prison. He tells Crito,

> We must therefore examine whether we should act in this way or not, as not only now but at all times I am the kind of man who listens to nothing within me but the argument that on reflection seems best to me. (46b)

Socrates must make a decision about what to do. Because he has studied these issues, he has resources he can draw upon to analyze and evaluate the situation.[360] In the dialogues I discussed, as I've shown, when Socrates draws others into this quest, he also tries to teach them some of these tools.

On this account, however, philosophy is necessarily recursive, because we no more have a handbook on *how* to pursue wisdom than we do on what wisdom itself is. It has sometimes been claimed that Socrates does not subject his own method, the *elenchus*, to scrutiny.[361] But I suspect that the plausibility of this claim depends more on how the commentators define the *elenchus* and the concerns of the texts they select than anything else. A wider view of Plato's dialogues reveals that Plato, at least, is very much concerned with methodology. The theory of recollection, the method of hypothesis (in its many manifestations), the method of division, the midwife metaphor in the *Theaetetus*, and perhaps even the theory of Forms itself all result from Plato's philosophical scrutiny of his own philosophical method. They are part of his ongoing attempt to discover what philosophy—the practice that pursues wisdom—actually is, and how it is done.

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[360] See also my comments about how Socrates uses his philosophical friends to make tough ethical decisions in Ch. 3, § 5.1.

[361] See, e.g., Vlastos (1992): "Socrates' inquiries display a pattern of investigation whose rationale he does not investigate. They are constrained by rules he does not undertake to justify" (1). See also Reeve (1989), § 3.8.

Indeed, Plato eventually develops some strong views about the nature and purpose of philosophy with which we might not want to agree. Plato works out a strong rationalist conception of philosophy and its subject matter. He thinks that philosophy looks beyond the physical world revealed by the senses to the eternal realm of the Forms, and that the philosopher should seek to free herself from her senses so that she might see the Forms, understand the Good, and thus be able to apply it in her life. We might disagree with Plato about whether this is the best way of conceiving of the philosophical search, particularly about whether Plato is right to set aside what the senses can tell us about the problems he's investigating. But I would say that the way Plato develops his conception of philosophy is, in a way, irrelevant to the argument I'm discussing here. When Socrates talks to Clinias or Lysis, he does not presume *how* philosophy must be done. He demonstrates philosophical inquiry, when he leads his young interlocutors through investigations in each dialogue, but he makes no claims that what he is doing is the only or the best way to do philosophy. If anything, he is careful to point out the problems with and weaknesses of the way they are doing things. So, as I'm interpreted the argument, the term 'philosophy' remains open. If Plato turns out to be *wrong* about how to pursue wisdom, the appropriate conclusion is that we need to keep working to discover a better way.

> *7. Therefore, practicing philosophy is necessary and sufficient for human happiness.* (from 5 and 6)
> *8. Therefore, in order to satisfy the desire in* (1)*, every human being must practice philosophy.*

Plato's conclusion, then, is that the practice of philosophy is the best (and, indeed, only) way that humans have of making better decisions and living as well as it is possible for humans to live. According to this argument, Socrates' activity of examining others and

discussing virtue may not be itself the best life conceivable. According to conclusion (4), the life of philosophy is not completely happy. But given human limitations, philosophical discussion makes possible the best life available to *us*. It is the best for us, first, because it enables us to maintain a sense of our limitations, which, as Socrates argues, is crucial for avoiding the misery caused by mistakes, so far as possible, and, second, because through it we are able to work out the best possible positive ideas about how to live well and continually to improve those ideas.

Now, we might well wonder, as Meno does, how what I am describing is even possible (see *Meno* 80d-e). How could we humans, knowing nothing, ever become wise even in a small way? In the *Meno*, Socrates produces the idea of recollection in order to make sense of how philosophical investigations are possible. But, as he emphasizes, the important thing is not *how* it is possible; the important thing is to make the effort:

> I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects, but I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and we must not look for it. (86b-c)

Similarly, in the *Phaedo*, Simmias describes the situation we face:

> One should achieve one of these things: learn the truth about these things or find it for oneself, or, if that is impossible, adopt the best and most irrefutable of men's theories, and, borne upon this, sail through the dangers of life as upon a raft, unless someone should make that journey safer and less risky upon a firmer vessel of some divine doctrine. (85c-d)

Philosophy enables us to put together and continually test the vessels on which we travel through our lives.

2.3 How plausible is this argument? It has some weaknesses, some of which Plato seems to recognize, others he does not. But I would contend that the general position Plato develops is, overall, both interesting and compelling.

As I've analyzed it above, the argument has two phases: The first (2-4) argues that, because humans lack ethical wisdom, they cannot achieve complete happiness. So we have a problem: How do we secure the happiness we desire, according to (1)? The second phase of the argument (5-8) gives Plato's solution: In order to satisfy our desire for happiness to the degree that we can in our situation, we must practice philosophy. An opponent could target this argument in two ways: He could object either to the first phase (denying that the reasoning that purports to show that humans cannot achieve complete happiness), or to the second phase (denying that *philosophy* must be the answer).

It seems to me that conclusion (4) in itself is hard to deny. After all, it seems to be true that no human ever achieves *complete* happiness. But some philosophers have defended the view that humans can achieve complete happiness, namely, the Epicureans. Epicurus contends "complete" happiness can be achieved by maintaining the proper attitudes about the objects of one's desires and recognizing the "limits" of pleasure and life: "He who knows the limits of life knows how easy it is to obtain that which removes pain caused by want and that which makes the whole of life complete [and thus completely happy]" (*Key Doctrine* 21, trans. Long and Sedley (1987)). According to Epicurus, happiness is constituted by freedom from mental disturbance. Therefore, the person who maintains tranquility (*ataraxia*) by satisfying necessary and natural desires and rooting out unnatural, unnecessary desires can sustain a level of happiness that cannot be improved in any way. The premise of Plato's argument that Epicurus would reject is (3): Epicurus

believes that some humans *can* possess the wisdom that produces complete happiness, in the form of *his* philosophical system.

Epicurus' view about happiness, however, is unusual. For my part, I am inclined to grant both claim (3) and conclusion (4). I think Socrates is right that humans do not have complete ethical wisdom. We do not understand in any systematic way how to live well or get along together in society. We merely do the best that we can, and even the most thoughtful among us do not *know* answers to ethical questions. The inability of Socrates' interlocutors to answer his questions—and, more importantly, our own inability as readers, in many cases, to do much better—is evidence that Socrates is right, that humans don't have the ethical knowledge that he is searching for.

But then the question becomes: Do we really *need* this wisdom to be happy? Indeed, would the kind of ethical wisdom that Socrates is looking for even *help*? This is a more serious objection to Plato's view, because even if (4) is true as stated, it may not be true for the reasons that *Plato* thinks it is true. Plato defends (4) on the basis of views about happiness, wisdom, and correct action that themselves are not given much defense in the dialogues I've considered.[362] In particular, consider claim (2). Socrates' argument for (2) in the *Euthydemus* (see Ch. 2, § 2.1), in brief, is as follows:

> *2a. Person S is happy to the extent that S makes correct decisions.*
> *2b. Therefore* (from 2a)*, S is* completely *happy only if S* consistently *or* always *makes correct decisions.*
> *2c. But S* consistently *makes correct decisions if and only if S has ethical wisdom.*

Therefore,

> *2. Ethical wisdom is necessary for complete happiness.*

[362] Indeed, as I discuss below, similar thoughts about happiness and wisdom also support the second phase of Plato's argument, (5-8).

This argument has two premises—(2a) and (2c)—both of which could be contested.

Let's start with (2c). According to (2c), a person *consistently* makes correct decisions just in case he is ethically wise. But someone might object that *wisdom* (especially the wisdom Socrates seeks) is not the only thing that can guide a person in making correct decisions. For practical purposes, mere *true opinions* can serve just as well (as Socrates himself concedes at *Meno* 96e-97c). Moreover, our objector might say, humans are able to *have* true opinions, whereas only the gods possess ethical wisdom. So maybe we should be satisfied with what we have—and maybe Socrates should not go around upsetting the opinions that people do have with all of his questions. Contrary to (2), therefore, ethical wisdom is not *necessary* for happiness, so long as a person has enough true opinions to make correct decisions when he needs to do so. Let's call this the "True Belief Objection."

It seems to me that this point made by the True Belief objection is sound enough, but all the same, the objection probably isn't enough by itself to cast serious doubt on (2c) or (2), at least as they are stated. That is because (2c) does not make the strong and implausible claim that a person without ethical wisdom *never* makes good decisions; it claims only that he cannot *consistently* make good decisions. This weaker claim seems true. Human life can be very complex, and so people will often face new situations and new choices. But in those new situations a person's mere opinions might no longer be sufficient. An opinion that is true and beneficial in one circumstance may well fail to be true in other circumstances; if so, it seems likely that only a person with actual *wisdom* or *knowledge* will be able to adapt to all circumstances that might arise. Moreover, we might

ask, how does a person come to have true opinions in the first place without knowledge or wisdom? For example, many Athenians believed that Themistocles was a good ruler and made good decisions on behalf of the city. But how could Themistocles make good decisions if, as Socrates argues in the *Meno*, he did not have knowledge? Socrates claims that good men like Themistocles are like soothsayers or prophets, who "say many true things when inspired, but have no knowledge of what they are saying" (99c). Prophets speak truths through divine inspiration; so also, Socrates claims, do some statesman. But, in cases like this, whether the person *has* true beliefs is not *his* doing. It's a result of good luck or divine favor—*eutuchia*. Even worse, how could he be sure that he really *was* right, if he did not examine his own beliefs?[363] Even if mere true opinions are sufficient for practical purposes, we cannot count on being fortunate enough to have opinions that just happen to be true.

A stronger objection can be raised against (2a), which makes the strong and controversial claim that happiness is produced by correctly *using* things. What reasons do we have to accept this claim? In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates defends (2a) by appealing to crafts (*technai*) like carpentry. A carpenter *needs* to use his tools and materials correctly in order to be successful at his job. Socrates claims that the same goes for happiness—a person becomes happy by correctly using the materials of life. But is that right? Is a happy life produced in the same way as a table or a house? That depends on what happiness itself actually is. Many people today conceive of happiness as a sort of state of mind or

[363] After all, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates argues that Themistocles, Pericles, and the other great leaders of Athenian history were actually wrong about what was best for Athens (515c-519b).

feeling.[364] If this is the right way of thinking of happiness, it may help to use the materials of life correctly, but there may be other factors that exert a greater influence, such as having a genetic predisposition to cheerfulness, or a good family and work situation. In other words, an objector might argue that *external factors* contribute much more significantly to a person's happiness than his correct choices, with the result that making correct choices would not be all that important for happiness after all. Perhaps there are people who remain happy even as they repeatedly make bad choices—they cheerfully laugh off their mistakes and continue with their lives. A similar result might follow, even if we suppose that happiness (or *eudaimonia*) is something more objective, like success. Many of Plato's contemporaries believed that people are happy or successful not because of wise choices, but because of good fortune or divine favor--*eutuchia* (see Ch. 2, § 1.1). Let's call this the "Happiness Objection."

The Happiness Objection creates similar problems for the second phase of Plato's argument, in particular, for claim (5), on which conclusions (7) and (8) are founded. Claim (5) contends that the *pursuit of wisdom* is necessary and sufficient for human happiness. But, on my interpretation, claim (5) rests on the same assumptions about happiness and ethical wisdom with which Plato defends (2)—premise (2a) factors directly into the argument for (5). The reasoning that supports (5) may be sketched as follows:

> *2a. Person S is happy to the extent that S makes correct decisions.*
> *5a. S makes correct decisions insofar as S avoids mistakes and develops reliable ethical beliefs.*

[364] In his book *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (2005), Richard Layard argues that happiness is a state of the brain that can be scientifically measured and studied. Of course, Socrates would deny that this is true. But when we consider Layard's approach, we can see the differences between ancient and modern conceptions of happiness. It is hard to say who is right. Perhaps Plato and Layard are simply talking about different things.

5b. The pursuit of wisdom is necessary *and* sufficient *for a human to avoid mistakes and develop reliable ethical beliefs to the extent possible.*

Therefore,

5. The pursuit of wisdom is necessary and sufficient to achieve whatever happiness a human being can achieve.

Ethical wisdom guarantees correct decisions. According to (5a) and (5b), the pursuit of wisdom—philosophy—provides a second best of way of making good decisions. But if, as the Happiness Objection suggests, happiness is produced not so much by correct decision-making as by a cheerful disposition or a good family, it might be possible to become pretty happy—that is, to achieve human happiness—without practicing philosophy. Practicing philosophy might not even help much. So if the Happiness Objection were successful, claim (5) would turn out to be false.

Now, it seems to me that, in isolation, neither of these objections is completely successful. Premise (2c) just seems true to me. Moreover, I think it is implausible that a person could be happy without making at least some and probably quite a lot of correct decisions. But if we combine the True Belief and Happiness Objections, we have an even more serious objection to Plato's view. Let's imagine a person (let's call him Bob) who, because of his *eutuchia*, has, on the one hand, lots of external goods: He is born into a good family, has a good upbringing, and is left with a fair amount of wealth and a healthy body. He has whatever external goods a person needs for happiness. In addition, Bob has a good supply of true beliefs. Because of his true beliefs, he acts correctly when he must, and he is lucky enough rarely to face decisions for which his true beliefs are insufficient. When, on occasion, he *does* make a bad decision, it always turns out well enough that his happiness is preserved. Under this scenario—which is plausible enough—Bob *seems* pretty

happy. Even if he is not completely happy, he is about as happy as we can imagine a mortal to be. But Bob does not have ethical wisdom, nor, indeed, has he ever sought wisdom, examined his beliefs, or practiced philosophy in any way. If a person like Bob is possible, we have a serious challenge to Plato's view. What could Plato say in response?

2.4 These objections highlight a major problem for Plato's view of which, it seems to me, Plato himself was well aware. The problem is that happiness might result, not from wisdom or good decision-making, but from good fortune, *eutuchia*. Bob is happy because he is very fortunate. So in order decisively to defend his strong claims about wisdom, happiness, and philosophy, Plato would need to show that a person *cannot* become happy (even humanly happy) through good luck alone. In these dialogues, Socrates tries to convince people to take *epimeleia* for their lives, by taking up the philosophical life. But what if it isn't *epimeleia* or philosophy that produces happiness, but *eutuchia*?

Socrates' arguments about *eutuchia* in the *Euthydemus*, which I analyzed in Ch.2, § 1, seek to address this problem. But these arguments are not successful. As I argued in that chapter, Socrates would need to do more to make these arguments convincing. He would need to tell us, in particular, what happiness actually is. If we understood happiness, perhaps we'd be better able to say whether or not wisdom is necessary or sufficient for complete happiness, and to what extent good fortune affects a person's happiness. We also might be able to determine the extent to which philosophy contributes to happiness, and the extent to which a person can achieve happiness without practicing philosophy.

To the extent that the impact of good fortune on happiness is still in doubt, then, both phases of Plato's argument have serious weaknesses. We cannot be sure whether

wisdom helps to produce complete happiness, nor whether practicing philosophy is necessary *or* sufficient for human happiness. Nevertheless, I don't think the line of thought Plato is advancing is hopeless, because even though he cannot *prove* that making correct decisions is necessary for happiness, he nevertheless makes a compelling and plausible case in favor of the philosophical life.

The first thing to notice is that, however objectively successful are Socrates' arguments for his position, he does manage to convince Clinias, Lysis, and Alcibiades to pursue wisdom, at least temporarily. They are convinced largely because they are already primed, in virtue of their characters, values, and aspirations, to accept Socrates' way of looking at things. All three are talented youths from noble families, and to a greater or lesser extent, they exhibit the "vigorous" nature that Socrates describes in *Republic* 6 as the characteristic feature of both potential philosophers and potential tyrants. As a result, they have high expectations for their lives, and Socrates works to inspire them to even greater ambitions (see above, § 1.1). As a result, it is relatively easy for Socrates to convince these youths that they need to pursue wisdom. If they hope someday to have others turn to them for guidance and leadership, they must develop the ability to navigate the complexities of leading and organizing a *polis*. But for a political leader avoiding mistakes (as much as possible) is crucial. Socrates' interlocutors in these dialogues are therefore already disposed to accept that making good decisions is crucial to living successfully. To the extent that we share their intuitions that a good life involves making contributions to the life and decisions of the community, we'll also find Socrates' arguments plausible.

But I would argue that, even setting aside considerations about political leadership, Socrates' reasoning about the need to avoid mistakes and to make good decisions (so far as

possible) is compelling. Human life is complicated, and we face many crucial decisions about how to "use" what life gives us. *Whatever* happiness might turn out to be, it seems plausible that our ability to make good and correct decisions would make a big difference in whether or not we achieve it. As Socrates points out in his arguments about *eutuchia* in the *Euthydemus* (see Ch. 2, § 1.6), it is the wise (or experts) who are best able to cope with and, to the extent that it is possible, master the vicissitudes of fortune. The possibility that we might stumble upon happiness accidentally provides little comfort—we can't count on that. A person like Bob, who just never faces a situation for which his unexamined beliefs are not adequate, is extremely lucky. It would be much better if we had some control over our own lives and how they turn out—that is, if there were some concrete way for us to take *epimeleia* for ourselves.

This is precisely what Socrates offers to his interlocutors. We cannot possess full ethical wisdom, but we can *pursue* wisdom, and it is the pursuit of wisdom, to which Socrates seeks to win his interlocutors and which he exemplifies in Plato's dialogues, that provides the best hope we have of gaining some control over our lives and happiness. That is because, as I described in the last section, philosophical examination gives us a way to *refine* and *test* the ethical beliefs we have. We are therefore able to develop the best possible beliefs about how to live, without relying on good fortune.

In the face of the objections we've been considering, therefore, Plato might have put his point in a differently: Unless you are willing to rely on good fortune, you need to pursue wisdom to achieve whatever happiness is possible for a human. Otherwise, the outcome and quality of your life won't be up to you. Forces beyond your control will determine how your life goes. You can *hope* to be like Bob, or you can recognize that

probably won't happen and take responsibility for yourself. Moreover, Plato strongly believes (perhaps rightly, perhaps not) that a person who, like Bob, has mostly true but unexamined ethical beliefs is extremely unlikely in Athens, simply because the unexamined beliefs that Athenians generally receive from their culture are, according to Plato, quite often disastrously false, because they lead people to expend all of their efforts and attention on things—like wealth, political power, and honor—that really aren't worth the trouble, while they neglect their true selves, their souls (see Ch. 1, § 3). In a city like Athens, Bob may be a merely theoretical possibility.

Of course, in the end, Plato may be wrong about the value of searching for wisdom, of practicing philosophy in the way Socrates does. Perhaps there is simply nothing that a person himself can do to influence whether or not he is happy. If happiness is mostly determined by genetic makeup or where or into what family one is born, the search for wisdom won't help much. Or maybe a person needs to make correct decisions to be happy, but actively searching for wisdom and practicing philosophy is not the way to do it. But, I don't think it is plausible that a person's happiness is not at all under his control. Moreover, to paraphrase Socrates' words to Meno, we'll be better and more active people if we believe that our happiness *is* up to us. So long as we do not *know* that the active search for wisdom and happiness is futile, shouldn't we try to do what we can?[365]

2.5 Through the character of Socrates, Plato demonstrates a way of life that is second best, one that is made possible through the practice of philosophy. The practice of

[365] Many Athenians, of course, would agree that they should try to improve their own and their childrens' chances for happiness, which is why so much money is spent on the classes of sophists and rhetoric teachers. But, according to Plato, at least, these people have false beliefs about what is important and worth pursuing, so their efforts are wasted. See Ch. 1, § 3.2.

philosophy, as exemplified by Socrates, enables a person to maintain a sense of his limits, to avoid mistakes of presumptiveness, and to construct the best possible answers about how to live and act.[366] In relying on these answers, the Socratic philosopher is, indeed, living according to true beliefs, not knowledge. Socrates often describes the ethical beliefs by which he lives in terms that suggest this contrast: "I am the kind of man who listens to nothing but the argument that on reflection seems best to me" (*Crito* 46b); "I don't know how these things are, but no one I've ever met, as in this case, can say anything else without being ridiculous" (*Gorgias* 509a). According to what he says these passages, Socrates does not *know* the answers. Rather, he acts upon the best, most unshakable conclusions that he can discern on each occasion. His philosophical practice and the wealth of beliefs and arguments that he has accumulated by "discussing virtue every day" with other people enable him to ensure that those beliefs are as good and reliable as he can make them.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that Plato does not think even Socrates' life was as good as it might have been. In *Republic* 6, Socrates describes how someone like himself would have to live in a city that, like Athens, is not ruled by philosopher-kings:

> [Socrates:] At the same time [the philosophers] have seen the madness of the majority and realized, in a word, that no one acts sanely in public affairs and that there is no ally with whom they might go to the aid of justice and survive [...] Taking all this into account, they lead a quiet life and do their own work. Thus, like someone who takes refuge under a little wall from a storm of dust or hail driven by the wind, the philosopher—seeing others filled with lawlessness—is satisfied if he can somehow lead his life free from injustice and impious acts and depart from it with good hope, blameless and content.
> [Adeimantus:] Well, that's no small thing for him to have accomplished before departing.

[366] Reeve (1989) suggests that, just as Socrates has a "human wisdom" that falls short of divine wisdom, so also he might exhibit a sort of "human virtue" and "human happiness" made possible by his human wisdom (see esp. Ch. 3). This is a useful way of talking, though Reeve does not develop these ideas as fully as he might.

> [Socrates:] But it isn't the greatest either, since he didn't chance upon a constitution that suits him. Under a suitable one, his own growth will be fuller, and he'll save the community as well as himself. (496c-497a, trans. Grube with Reeve)

Socrates, I would contend, does not "[take] refuge under a little wall." Instead, he works in the best ways he knows how to do what is best for his fellow-citizens and, I would argue, to recruit "allies" in the service of justice. But this passage makes clear that, at least when he wrote the *Republic*, Plato had come to believe that Socrates' life was, through no fault of his own, only second best. Socrates might have achieved his full potential and lived an even better life had he been in a better city.

2.6 This brings me to one last objection to the picture I have been developing: According to what I've said, philosophy ends up being (at least at first) merely the best *means* to the good life, not the good life itself. Or, as I put it above, the philosophical life that Socrates exemplifies in Plato's early dialogues is only second best. But, an objector might say, Socrates' commitment to the philosophical life seems to be deeper than that. He says that it is the "best life for a human being." It is not that there is *some other* way of life that he hopes to learn about, such that, when he discovers it, he will give up philosophy and take up that other way of life.[367] In the *Apology*, he refuses to give up the philosophical life at all, and he says that he looks forward to continuing his investigations after he is dead (38a; 41b-c). He says, "It would be an extraordinary happiness [*amêchanon ... eudaimonias*] to talk with them [the dead heroes], to keep company with them and

[367] You can get a sense of the objection by thinking about what I said in Ch. 2 about how we are ignorant of the content of happiness. I suggested that that happiness might turn out to be driving on the NASCAR circuit (§ 4.3). But suppose that philosophers discover that this is the case. Would they give up philosophy and try to get into NASCAR? Probably not.

examine them" (41c3-4). Talking with the dead heroes, Socrates says, is "extraordinary" happiness. Contrary to my interpretation, therefore, Socrates here appears to be claiming that philosophy *is* the best life, not a mere means to a good life, or a stopgap way of living that is only the second best.

I have three responses to this objection: First, as I mentioned above, I do not claim that the argument I am outlining is the *only* one that someone could give to defend the value of a philosophical life. Perhaps a convincing argument could be given to show that *eudaimonia* is actually *constituted* by philosophical activity and dialectic discussions. According to the argument I've outlined, a philosopher searches for the wisdom he needs to live well. But it is possible that, if someone had that wisdom, he would know that the happiest life is to live just as Socrates lived.[368] (After all, as I said before, we still don't know exactly what happiness itself actually *is*.) My point is that, in the dialogues I have analyzed, Socrates does not argue for the stronger claim. He gets the youths with whom he talks to practice philosophy by convincing them that philosophy is necessary as a *means* to the good life, not that it *is* the good life.

Second, I would contend that, even on the reasoning I've outlined above, philosophy would always remain at least part of any good *human* life, whatever else that good life involves. Since humans are incapable of the complete and unshakeable knowledge that gods have, they can never stop practicing philosophy. For one thing, according to (4), humans will never achieve a perfect understanding of ethical matters; they'll always have more to know. For another, they must continually work to maintain the

[368] I think that this is the reading that Nehamas (1999) has of Socrates' happiness: "Socrates offered to teach no one, since he believed he had nothing to teach. [...] Yet it was just the pursuit of knowledge that led Socrates to do, habitually, the right thing. [...] Socrates was virtuous, and yet he had no explanation of that fact" (Ch. 2, p. 49).

wisdom they have. One problem humans have is we *forget*, and we must continually study and work to maintain what knowledge we achieve (see *Symposium* 208a3-4: "what we call *studying* [*meletan*] exists because knowledge is leaving us").[369] Another problem is that we humans are always at risk of thinking that we know what we do not, no matter how vigilant we are.[370] I imagine that, even in the Kallipolis, the most advanced philosopher kings, who have seen the Forms and thus know as much about the Good and happiness as any human can know, still need to be cautious in this respect. They need to be examined, by themselves and by others, so that they do not stray into the most reproachable ignorance of thinking they know what they do not. Therefore, contrary to what the objection fears, philosophy will never be eliminated as a component of a good human life.

Third, in other dialogues—such as the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*—when Socrates says more about what humans are striving for and what the good life would be, philosophical activity of the sort that Socrates praises in the *Apology*, dialectic, does not actually end up being the goal. In these dialogues, dialectic is, if anything, only a means to the real goal of human life—knowledge, or contemplation of the Forms, or giving birth in beauty. For example, in the *Phaedo*, philosophy is described as "practice for dying and death" (64a). Philosophy allows us to escape the contamination of the body, so that, when we die, we can finally achieve the pure knowledge we truly desire (66b-67b). In the *Republic*, dialectic is merely an item on the list of subjects that potential philosophers need to learn, so that they might eventually escape the Cave and gaze on true

[369] Diotima's word here, "*meletan*," is cognate with *epimeleia*. Perhaps one reason that we need to take *epimeleia* for our souls is so that we can preserve the knowledge that is continually leaving us.
[370] Even Socrates is at risk of this. See *Crito* 48e-9a and *Phaedo* 91c, which I discussed at Ch. 3, § 5.1.

reality. And so on. In these dialogues, it is not examining and talking that is the good life. It is something else, which philosophical discussion and examination make possible.

Now, someone might object that the dialogues to which I refer above are from Plato's middle period, so he may have changed his views about the good life over time. I admit that this is possible. Perhaps he had one view when he wrote the *Apology*, a different one when he wrote the *Euthydemus* and *Lysis*, and yet another when he wrote the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. Nevertheless, given that Plato's later views clearly do not suggest that philosophical inquiry *itself* is the best possible life, we might wonder how seriously Socrates' passing remark in the *Apology* that talking to heroes and examining them is "extraordinary happiness" should be taken. In light of the way that the philosophical life is depicted and the role it plays in Plato's work *outside* of the *Apology*, I am tempted to suspect that Socrates' strong claims about it in his speech are, to some extent, hyperbole.[371] When he says that philosophy is the best life for a human being, he means that philosophy is the best life we have available *in our circumstances*. But that leaves open the possibility that, in other circumstances (in the Kallipolis, or when we are disembodied souls) we might have a better life or greater happiness. The value of my project is that it gives an account of the best life that Plato believes to be available to us in the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

However that might be, my claim here is limited: Whatever else Plato believed about the good life, he believed (and had Socrates argue, in these dialogues) that, in our human circumstances, philosophical enquiry is the best way available for us to make

[371] I do not like to take a developmentalist line, but I think that it is possible that while Socrates believed (solely on the evidence of his own experience) that talking to legendary figures would be inconceivable happiness, Plato came to believe, on the contrary, that philosophical discussion was merely a sort of cleansing exercise to prepare the soul to achieve its real goal, contemplation of the Forms.

progress toward that life and, as much as possible, to secure that life now. Philosophy provides us with the best tools for refining and improving our beliefs about the good life—including ways to refine the tools themselves (see my discussion of claim (6) above). This argument may not be the strong defense of the philosophical life that we might want. But I maintain that the view I've been describing affords us a compelling and powerful vision of the place that philosophy has in a good life.

3. Motivation and the philosophical life

3.1 I've described how, in the dialogues I analyzed, Socrates seeks to motivate his interlocutors to pursue the philosophical life. I have also discussed some ways in which Plato seeks, by means of the dialogues, to motivate his readers in similar ways. In the process, we've seen the sort of motivations to which Socrates and Plato appeal and which they believe to lie behind the philosophical life.

As I've shown, it is only part of Socrates' mission to change his interlocutors' beliefs. Socrates is not trying to convert interlocutors to a belief system that he holds to be true (*contra* the hidden expert interpretation). Rather, he is trying to stir up within them the motivations that will lead them to pursue philosophical lives and to recruit them for a project that he believes is among the most important in which a person can engage.

If this picture of Socrates' mission is correct, we have a way of responding to a persistent charge against Socrates as educator. It is sometimes claimed that Socrates' methods for approaching his fellow citizens are fatally flawed, because he holds a sort of intellectualism about human psychology and action that prevents him from recognizing the complexity of the psychological forces driving human action. Nehamas (1999, Ch. 2)

explains the supposed problem as follows: Socrates believes that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue and thus happiness. But because of this, he makes the mistake, as Grote put it, "of dwelling exclusively on the intellectual conditions of human conduct, and omitting to give proper attention to the emotional and volitional" (cited by Nehamas, p. 27). That is, Socrates believes he can improve his fellow citizens simply by changing their beliefs, and he fails to realize what more is involved in being virtuous and living well. In order to be virtuous, a person must have not only true beliefs, but also appropriate habits of emotional and volitional response. Socrates fails as a moral educator, so the argument goes, because he fails to see all that a moral educator must do.

According to Nehamas, this stark version of the charge against Socrates fails. It fails, first of all, because Socrates never *claims* to know or teach ethical truths. He has beliefs, which he sometimes tries to persuade others to accept.[372] But the main purpose of his protreptic efforts is to turn his interlocutors toward the *practice* of philosophy. If they are *not* convinced by his arguments but are, instead, unsettled and made to wonder what the truth might be—so much the better. And indeed, my research has shown how perceptive Socrates actually is about what motivates people and about how to tap into those motivations. He appeals to Clinias' desire for happiness, Lysis' love for his parents and competitive friendship with Menexenus, and Alcibiades' desire for greatness and shame at

[372] At *Gorgias* 454d ff., Socrates distinguishes between "conviction-persuasion" and "teaching-persuasion," in order to show that, when an orator speaks to a large gathering or a jury, he does not teach them about the issue at hand, but only makes it so that they are convinced. As Socrates explains, conviction-persuasion "results in being convinced without knowing," whereas teaching-persuasion "results in knowing" (454e). Given this distinction, when Socrates tries to persuade Polus to accept that doing injustice is worse than suffering it or when he seeks to persuade Callicles to abandon his view about natural justice, he must be trying to produce conviction-persuasion. Polus and Callicles will not *know* that these things are true, since even Socrates says, "I don't know how these things are" (509a). So if Socrates succeeds, they'll be convinced without knowing.

being found inadequate.[373] Socrates knows that, if you are to change someone's life and priorities, you have to get a grip on what motivates them. In the same way, Plato anticipates the loves, desires, and values of his readers. He knows that they want to live well and to gain understanding, and he constructs his dialogues to appeal to these desires. Far from "omitting to give proper attention to the emotional and volitional," Socrates and Plato pay quite a bit of attention to these elements.

At the same time, practically speaking, the influence Socrates can have on his interlocutors is limited. The habits of thinking inculcated by Athenian culture run deep, and, as we see, for example, in the case of Alcibiades, bad habits will reassert themselves when Socrates and his questions are gone. The best Socrates can hope for is to get his interlocutors sufficiently interested and puzzled that they want to talk to him again and to continue the search. Perhaps, eventually, the habits of true philosophical thinking would begin to take root. We can't be sure, from the dialogues, whether or how Plato thinks this would happen. Plato does not often show Socrates talking to his more talented and promising companions.[374] Perhaps he was not as interested in this side of Socrates' life as in his teacher's encounters with hostile or uninformed characters. Nevertheless, it is clear that the historical Socrates at least did *have* companions, with whom he often practiced philosophy and discussed virtue.

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[373] As I argued (see Ch. 4, § 1.2), shame plays a significant role in Socrates' interactions with Alcibiades, though it does not, as far as I can tell, in the *Euthydemus* and *Lysis*. Another dialogue in which shame plays an important part in Socrates' attempts to change the lives of his interlocutors is the *Gorgias*. See McKim (1989).

[374] There are exceptions, of course: the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, perhaps, and certainly the *Theaetetus*.

3.2 As I mentioned above (§1.1), Plato's Socrates often seems drawn to characters with great political ambition. What's more, he often frames his arguments so as to suggest that the wisdom to which he is directing them will help them actually to *fulfill* their ambitions.[375] I think it is reasonable to ask whether Socrates is being fair when he makes these promises (implicitly or explicitly). After all, Socrates probably does not anticipate that Lysis or Alcibiades will actually achieve the level of wisdom a competent political leader really needs.

But let's put that problem aside for now. Whatever Socrates' intentions, it is undeniable that when he makes this kind of argument, he turns political ambition on its head. The youths to whom he talks imagine that political power will give them freedom from restrictions. Their notion of political power reaches its highest manifestation in the form of the tyrant. They believe that a tyrant, having power and free from restrictions, can have anything he wants, without having to listen to or obey anyone else. This is the line of thought that is developed by Polus and Callicles in the *Gorgias*.[376] A tyrant like Archelaus can kill, imprison, or exile whomever he wants without suffering the consequences (466b-c). If he has this power, the thinking goes, he can achieve supreme happiness (492c). Socrates argues that, on the contrary, the true political leader is not a tyrant with the license to pursue his own unrestrained desires, but rather a servant of his people.[377] With Lysis,

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[375] O'Connor (1998) and Scott (2000) make some interesting and helpful comments on this topic. According to O'Connor, potential tyrants and potential philosophers are the same, so Socrates approached and played upon his interlocutors' ambitions to interest them in what he had to say. But Socrates' eventual message was resignation, that political wisdom is out of our reach. Similarly, Scott describes how, in both the *Lysis* and *Alcibiades*, Socrates arouses his interlocutors' *erôs* for power, only to re-impose limits upon their *erôs*, thereby transforming it into a love for wisdom.

[376] See also *Alcibiades* 134e-135b.

[377] This argument is made, more or less explicitly, in many places. See, e.g., *Lysis* 210a, *Alcibiades* 134b-c, *Gorgias* 504d-e and 513e-514a, and *Republic* 1.341c-342e and 7.520a-d.

Socrates argues that the boy can gain the freedom to do what he wants only if he becomes wise; but that is because, when he is wise and knows what to do, others will want to put him in control of things. He'll be the best *epitropos* (manager) of their affairs. So also, in the *Alcibiades*, Socrates gets Alcibiades to see that a political leader's business is to take care of his state, to ensure that it has mutual friendship and is free from civil strife (126c), and to impart virtue to its citizens (134b-c). Even as he uses his young interlocutors' political ambitions in order to draw them into his philosophical search, Socrates subtly transforms those ambitions.

Interestingly, Lysis and Alcibiades do not seem less interested in political power after Socrates changes its look. Perhaps, as I suggested in Ch. 4, this *is* what they really wanted all along. Socrates helps them to understand their own desires more clearly, by clearing away their false beliefs about what the goals of their lives should be.[378]

4. Conclusion: The cooperative nature of philosophy

4.1 One of the good things about the ideal *polis*, Kallipolis, is that it would provide the conditions for philosophy to flourish and for citizens to live the best lives of which they are capable.[379] The rulers of the Kallipolis make sure that philosophically promising youths,

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[378] The case of Callicles is more complex, but I think that the same thing happens to him, as well. He begins to see that what Socrates is saying seems right, and he begins to desire to be a true political leader of the sort Socrates describes. At 515b, he seems somewhat embarrassed that he has not improved anyone in his political career. Through the whole discussion at the end of the dialogue (concerning the failings of the great Athenian leaders), he seems to concede Socrates' view about what a political leader *should* do. He is hesitant to agree when Socrates asserts that they failed (e.g., at 516c, 517a). But Socrates does not have complete success, since Callicles is, in the end, unwilling to give up his previous views.

[379] According to the *Republic*, only those with philosophical talent—golden souls—learn to practice philosophy and thereby eventually gain the ability to see the Forms. The others in the society do the jobs for which they are naturally best suited, and their lives are ordered for the best by the rulers. The soldiers and producers cannot achieve the higher kind of life made possible by philosophy, but they do live the best lives of which they are capable, given their natural talents and predilections. This elitist policy in the *Republic* apparently contrasts with Socrates' more egalitarian description of his mission in the *Apology*, where he says that he

from an early age, are kept away from competing influences and corrupting poetry and music. They nurture the youths' good habits and provide training for the youths' intellectual abilities. And when these young philosophers get older, they find plenty of other philosophers and philosophically minded people around with whom they can engage in the philosophical activities appropriate to their age and training. In such a city, *philosophia* as the activity of pursuing wisdom would be as fully realized as it is possible for it to be in an imperfect, all-too-human world.

But Socrates and Plato did not live in such a *polis*, nor do we. In our societies, the instruments of culture work against sound moral development. We are confronted from all sides by false or misleadingly simplistic ethical answers. The training of our habits and intellectual abilities is haphazard at best, destructive at worst. And (perhaps more so in Socrates' time than now) we have few others with whom we can develop and practice the philosophical way of life by which we might make progress out of this mess. What are we to do? How do we live well?

Plato's answer, I believe, is that we should form communities of inquiry and try to draw others into the philosophical quest. This is, I believe, the lesson that Plato learned from Socrates. Socrates believed both that he was living the best life available to him, and that he was conferring the greatest of benefits on his fellow citizens. These things are

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examines "anyone I happen to meet, young and old, citizen and stranger" (30a). One explanation for the difference might be that Plato changed his mind. Perhaps, when he wrote the *Apology*, he believed that everyone should be exposed to philosophical examination, but later he decided it was better for the less intelligent to hold on to their traditional beliefs. But I think the difference can be explained without appealing to speculative developmental hypotheses, because the *circumstances* of Socrates' Athens and the Kallipolis are so much different. In the Kallipolis, non-philosophers have reliable source of true beliefs; in a normal city, however, they do not. As a result, it is much more important, in a city like Athens, that each person take responsibility for himself, if not by actively searching for wisdom, at least by maintaining his humility and avoiding ethical hubris.

connected. The philosophical life is the best for Socrates himself because it enables him to maintain his human wisdom and to advance his limited understanding of the most important matters in human life. But it also benefits others because, in practicing his philosophical search, he draws them into the quest, helping them to live better lives. He is happy to help others such as Ctesippus, Clinias, Menexenus, and Lysis, because he himself gains by acquiring new philosophical friends. This side of Socrates' mission was successful. Both in his own life, and later, through the works of his student Plato, Socrates created a new philosophical community, working together on the greatest problems of human life.

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